

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

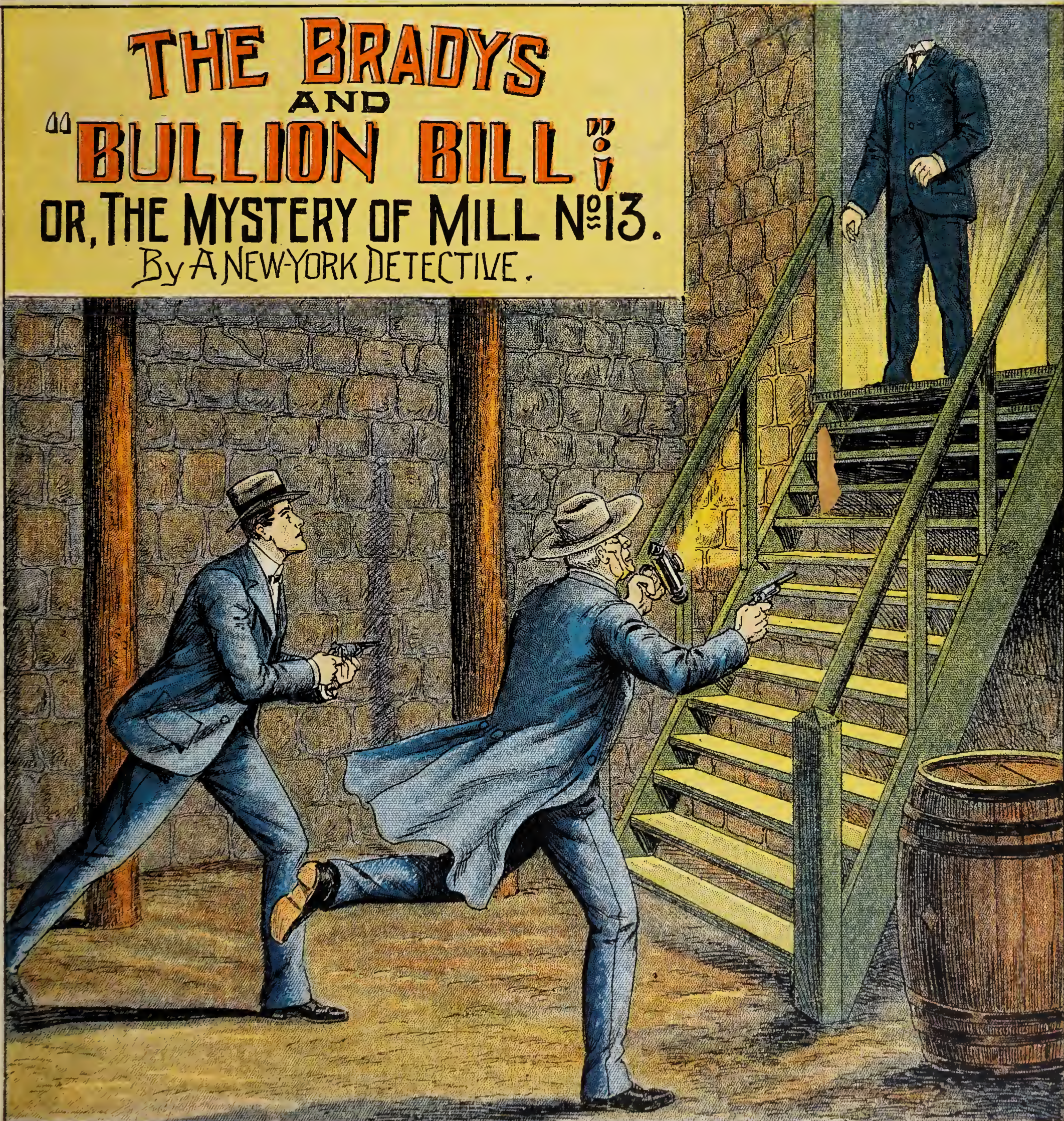
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No. 314.

NEW YORK, JANUARY 27, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AND "BULLION BILL" OR, THE MYSTERY OF MILL N^o 13. By A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.



"I don't know where your head is, but I am coming up to help you find it!" shouted Old King Brady.
With the lantern in one hand and his revolver in the other, the old
detective went bounding up the stairs.

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THE BRADYS AND "BULLION BILL"

OR,

The Mystery of Mill No. 13.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

A DEAL WITH BULLION BILL.

They were having a high time at Black Creek.

Nothing vicious about it—just fun and horse play, trials of skill with the rifle, riding, etc., with free drinks for every one who cared to call for the same at the bar of the "Grub-stakes" saloon.

It was "Bullion Bill's" treat.

Bill had just got back from Deadwood, where it was believed that he made a turn in mining stocks which had netted him \$40,000.

Besides this, he had safely disposed of his bullion, and was back again at Black Creek ready to purchase more.

The "big fellow," with his long black hair hanging down over his shoulders under the huge white hat, his blue shirt and diamond stud, his long boots and all the rest, formed quite a picturesque object as he paced up and down in front of the "Grub-stakes," cheering the "boys" on.

"Good for you, Henry! You're the best rider in South Dakota!" he shouted, as an athletic young fellow came dashing up on a broncho, leading five others by a head and more.

"Get in and tank up, boys! All free to-night! In with you! Whoop! Let her go!"

And Bullion Bill, drawing his revolver, began banging away into the air, just to let off steam, so to speak.

He pretended to be very drunk—but he wasn't.

He had been drinking all day out of his own particular bottle, which everyone supposed contained whisky—but it didn't.

Bill owned the Grub-stakes, and he also owned the "bar-keep."

Bill's bottle contained cold tea.

So while the boys crowded into Bill's to "tank up," Bill himself marched up and down in front of the log houses which were all the buildings Black Creek could boast of.

The keepers of the two stores and the honest miners who worked for the big Golden Dream Mining Co. back in the hills, now in town making their Saturday night purchases, eyed him with both fear and disgust.

Fear because the man owned every house at the Creek and all the land for miles around.

It was no matter of locating under the mining law.

Bullion Bill had bought the property outright, little by little, from its original locators.

The man was a power in that region. He controlled everything outside the Golden Dream.

But no amount of prosperity could ever make a gentleman out of Bill Lemons.

He prided himself on playing the rough and ready miner.

He gloried in his bad reputation, and his special pleasure was getting other people drunk and starting them gambling away their dust at the Grub-stake.

Yet he never gambled himself, and seldom drank except from his own special bottle.

Everyone knew this.

Secretly all hands felt that Bullion Bill was a fraud and a fake, but no one dared to say so.

Bill was a dead shot, and as proud of the men he had put out of business as an Indian is of the scalps he has taken.

And there were other reasons why people at Black Creek feared Bullion Bill, which will develop as our story proceeds.

The riding over, a shooting test began by Bill's orders.

The mark was an old plug hat hung from a pole, and the test of skill was to see how many shots each of the boys i

the contest could put into the crown with the revolvers as they went dashing by on their horses.

There were ten in the contest, and a twenty dollar gold piece was to be the prize.

As the men lined up on their horses, ready for the start, Bill's attention was turned to a young fellow who stood by himself, watching these proceedings.

He was dressed in a suit which had seen its best days, his shoes were all gone, and even the plug hat on the pole was better than the one he wore.

"Hyar, you stranger, what's the matter with you taking a hand in?" bawled Bill. "Blame my sister's cats, but you look as though the prize would come handy in case it should happen to come your way."

"Everything is the matter," replied the young man, quietly. "In the first place, I have no horse; in the next place, I have no revolver; besides that——"

"Besides that you can't shoot, I s'pose?" sneered Bill. "You'd better learn if you mean to stop around these parts, I'll tell you that straight."

"I don't know that I shall stop here, mister," replied the young man. "I'm just knocking about. As for shooting, I reckon I can hold my own with any man in this crowd."

"You can, eh?"

"I said so."

"With me?"

"I don't know how you can shoot, mister. I never had the chance to find out."

"It's a blamed lucky thing for you that you didn't, then. What's your name?"

"Jack Durand."

"Whar you from?"

"I came up from Cripple Creek, but I belong in Arizona."

"Know anything about mining?"

"I've worked in mines most all my life. I ought to, I think."

"Waal, then, I tell you, Jack, you shall have a trial. If you can shoot, if you can prove yourself one of the boys, I'll take you under my wing and then your fortune is made. Hello, thar, Charlie! Fetch a horse and let the feller have a chance. Lively now!"

A horse was brought, and the young man, springing into the saddle, lined up with the rest with one of Bill's revolvers in his hand.

"Let her go!" shouted Bill, firing in the air.

There was a mad dash by the leader, and in an instant the firing was on.

"One in!" bawled Bill. "Next! Two in! Next! Skunk! Next! Three in—one in—two in! Four in, b'gosh! Skunk!"

And so it went.

It was the young stranger who put four shots in the crown of the hat, and his proved the best score.

Then it was a line-up at the Grubstakes' bar, Bullion Bill drinking his tea with the rest.

While the others were on their third round Bill pulled out and beckoned to the young man to follow him.

Leading the way into a little room which he called his office, and in which as a matter of fact he managed to transact a good deal of business in course of the year, he closed the door, flung himself into an old armchair, lit a cigar, and giving the young fellow another, eyed him steadily for some moments without speaking.

"Jack," he said then, "do you want to make a stake?"

"Sure I do, boss," was the reply. "Perhaps you can tell me how it can be done."

"Perhaps I can. You came tramping into this town last night and this morning you applied to me for help. I was too busy to talk to you then, but I have time enough now. I do sometimes lend young fellows a helping hand, but in return I require a whole lot from them. I can show you a way to make five thousand dollars within the next two weeks, but question is can I trust you? That's hard to tell, for you are a stranger to me."

"Boss, if you'll show me the way to make five thousand dollars there's nothing in this world I wouldn't do for you," the young man replied.

"You think you mean that, son, but you, like others, may change your mind."

"You'll find me straight."

"Once in with me it's stay in or get out of this hyar town. I want you to understand that."

"I don't quite understand, I think."

"What I mean is that I don't allow no has-beens to hang around hyar. Boys who have worked for me can't pull up stakes and hire out elsewhere, not in this region. You can go away altogether, of course; that's different."

"That's all right, then. What's the business?"

"I buy bullion."

"So I hear."

"It's this way: there are a dozen small mills around these hills running from five to ten stamps each; then there are the bigger mills of the Golden Dream—they are scattered over a district of about fifty miles' radius. I buy their bullion, too."

"I should think they would handle it themselves."

"Son, they can't. We are miles from any railroad hyar, and nobody seems to care to build one over this rough country. To ride bullion to Deadwood is dangerous business. Lots have lost their lives trying it, to say nothing of their bullion. Now they don't try it. Bullion Bill attends to all that. I have my big mule teams, and I have my men. I employ upwards of a hundred and fifty. We ride the bullion, and we never get attacked. I buy for cash and sell for cash. My percentage isn't such a heavy tax on the miners. Even the Golden Dream people pay it. They have to! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But this big pay you promise—where does it come in? Not in driving a mule team, surely."

"Certainly not. My boys get good pay for that, too. It's straight, honest work, but there is some work done which

Bullion Bill paused, struck a match, touched it to his cigar, and took a fresh light, at the same time fixing his little eyes upon young Durand.

"You mean that there is some work to be done which isn't quite so honest," the young man replied, with perfect calmness.

"I didn't say so."

"But that is what you meant."

"Suppose I did. Would it faze you?"

"Not much."

"Then you are the sort I want."

"All right; and you are the man I want to get next to, providing the deal is safe."

"Oh, it's safe enough. Say, I'd like to see the man who would dare to fool with me. Know who's sheriff of this hyar county?"

"I don't. I'm a stranger here."

"Then you see him."

"You!"

"Ah, ha!"

"All right, boss. I'm your man."

"Very good. Where are you stopping?"

"I stopped in a room over Barnes' saloon last night."

"Stay there. To-morrow night at nine o'clock you report at the Diller Ranch. That's a desert hut near Mill No. 13, on the Golden Dream."

"How do I get to it?"

"You will look up for yourself during the day and locate the place, so that you can find it again at night. I want you to come back hyar to your supper. I want you to show yourself on the street early in the evening, and of course I don't want you to tell a blamed soul where you are going. You may mention that you have engaged with me if you wish, but don't say any more—see?"

"I understand."

"Now one word more. If you have any notion of going back on this you want to light right out to-night and never show yourself around these parts again."

"I shan't go back on you, boss."

"Good! Now we are through. Get out and join the boys."

Young Durand left the room then, and after a little he slipped out of the saloon and wandered out of town among the hills.

He walked slowly, and from time to time looked behind him with the air of a man who was afraid of being followed.

At last, having passed down into a wooded valley through which a stream ran, he quickened his steps and pushed on until he came in sight of a large frame building standing against the hill on the other side of the creek.

That this was a quartz-mill was evident from the long ore runway which extended back to the tunnel against the hill.

The place wore an air of complete desertion.

Painted on the front were the figures 13.

This was the hoodoo mill of the Golden Dream.

For a year and more it had been closed, and not for any amount of pay could men be found to work there.

Considering his supposed ignorance of the country thereabouts, young Durand certainly seemed to know very well how to get to Mill No. 13.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRADYS GET DOWN TO BUSINESS.

Having reached Mill No. 13, young Durand, without making any attempt to enter the place, sat down on a stone and waited for a good half hour.

He neither moved nor uttered a sound.

He seemed like a cat watching a rat-hole.

His eyes were fixed upon the closed door of the mill and the shuttered window above.

But if he was watching for anything to happen in or about the building he was doomed to disappointment, for nothing occurred.

The shadows of evening were now falling, and it was growing decidedly cool.

"I must get a move on," Durand muttered.

"It can't be possible that I have been observed. I surely would have seen or heard something. Perhaps, after all, there is to be nothing doing to-night. I don't know whether to start in to explore the mill or not."

He arose and paced up and down before the door.

He seemed rather to court observation than to make any attempt to hide himself, and yet he had not obeyed the orders of Bullion Bill, and he knew from what he had heard from others besides the magnate of Black Creek that to disobey orders might mean death.

Thus it would seem that the young man had very important reasons for acting as he did.

At last his patience was rewarded.

Suddenly a low whistle rang out among the trees.

It was a very peculiar sound, and might easily have been mistaken for the note of some whistling bird.

Instantly the young man whistled in a similar way, but at the end struck a different note.

A rustling was then heard among the bushes, and in a minute an old man stepped out into view whose personal appearance would have attracted attention in a crowded city street, and he looked even more out of place here in this lonely spot among the Black Hills.

He was tall and not over-stout, standing as straight as an arrow.

He wore a long blue coat of peculiar cut, with brass buttons down the front.

Upon his head was an old white hat with a brim even broader than the one worn by Bullion Bill.

Instead of a modern collar and tie, his was an old-fashioned "stock," style of 1840, with a stand-up collar having long points sticking straight out from his chin.

And all this gave the old man a back-number appearance which might well cause anyone to mistake him for a crank of some description.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

This man was none other than the world-famous detective—Old King Brady.

That young "Durand" was none other than Young King Brady, partner and pupil of the old detective, need scarcely be said.

"So you have come at last, Governor," Harry remarked in a low tone, audible enough to Old King Brady, but which could scarcely have been heard at the mill.

"I came as soon as I could, Harry," was the reply. "I didn't know that we had fixed upon any special time. I told you I would be here just before dark."

"That's right. I am tired of waiting and so got impatient. Well, what's the news?"

"None with me. I've been lying low. I have depended upon you for news."

"I can't give you much. I'm engaged. That's about all."

"And that is the whole thing. Have any trouble?"

"Well, no. I asked Bullion Bill for a job, but he turned me right down and I thought that was going to be the end of it."

"But wasn't, though."

"Not at all. I hung around, he was whooping things up all day. He pretended to be drunk, and he got everyone else drunk, but I am satisfied that not a drop of liquor passed his lips."

"How did he manage?"

"Used his own special bottle at each round."

"Humph! Cold tea, I suppose."

"I suppose. They were shooting at a hat, and he suddenly asked me to join in."

"And you did, and with what success?"

"I put four shots into the hat riding, which was one better than anyone else, and that brought me a twenty-dollar goldpiece—the prize."

"And put you into Bill's good graces."

"At once. He called me into his private office and put me through a course of questioning, which I daresay he considered very thorough."

"Such people are always as blind as bats if you only let them think they are running things, Harry; but once you butt up against them they become as keen as hawks."

"I suppose there is no doubt about this man's ability, Governor."

"Not the least. He is not at all what he pretends to be, but an educated man in his own way. I understand that he once practiced law somewhere in the Southwest."

"Very likely. He can talk all right. Now, Governor, explain this mystery. When I got back from Richmond and struck the office I found your letter telling me that you had started for the Black Hills and directing me to go in disguise to Black Creek and try and work in with this

here to-night, and here I am without the least idea what it is all about excepting in a general way."

"And the general way covers the ground, Harry. This man stands in the road of all progress here. He has done everything in his power to prevent the building of a branch railroad in from Deadwood to tap this region, and has succeeded. He levies a heavy tax on all mills which are forced to sell him their bullion at a big discount, for the reason that no wagon sent direct by the mill owners ever gets through to Deadwood. The attack always comes and the drivers are slaughtered by masked men, the bullion is taken, the wagons destroyed and the mules or horses stampeded, but never stolen, which marks the shrewdness of the man."

"And they believe this to be the work of Bullion Bill?"

"The Golden Dream people so believe; there are others who doubt it. As for Bill himself, he has ever been the most active in trying to catch these thieves, or in pretending to do so, at least."

"Are his trains never attacked?"

"On the contrary, they have frequently been attacked, according to the testimony of Bill and his men; but this bullion buyer always comes out victorious, and the strange part of it is that none of the attacking party are ever captured or even killed."

"And what do you think about it, Governor?"

"I am not prepared to say. I have no real proof that the man is a crook. We have been engaged by the Golden Dream people to clear away the mystery which hangs over this mill and incidentally to look into Mr. Bullion Bill and learn a little more about his methods. That's the job, Harry, and we want to knuckle down to it as quick as ever we can. I have been prowling about for a week and have not been able to put my finger on a single thing to indicate that Bullion Bill is actually a criminal or even that he is engaged in crooked business now."

"Then I have been more fortunate than you, Governor, for I have."

"You have!"

"Yes."

"What?"

"He offers me five thousand dollars within a few weeks to do something for him."

"Is that so! What is it?"

"He did not state, but he practically admitted that it was crooked work."

"It's a good start. When are you to know more about it?"

"I am to meet him to-morrow night at a place called the Diller Ranch, some deserted hut near here. I haven't had time to look it up yet."

"It's right here, just a little way back from the mill."

"And that's the end of my story, Governor. Now, what about this mill and the mystery which hangs over it? I haven't dared to talk much. I see the place is closed up—why?"

"Ah, ha!"

"Every miner in the neighborhood believes it. Strange stories are told of a woman in white with a bloody stain over the heart seen here. The plant is an expensive one, and the Golden Dream people are very loath to pull it to pieces. It has now been idle for over a year."

"And can no clew to the mystery be discovered?"

"It would seem so. Every effort has been made to solve the mystery, so they say."

"Is the Golden Dream far from here?"

"Mill No. 1 is about five miles away—that's headquarters. You see, the company owns a large tract of mountain land and they use tunneling exclusively, building a mill in connection with each tunnel. There are twenty of them altogether. The fact that this one was No. 13 is unfortunate, for it only makes the miners more superstitious about the place."

"And I suppose your scheme is for us to interview the ghost to-night?"

"That's it, Harry. We can do nothing until we know the whole story, and there is nothing like seeing for oneself."

"That's the talk."

"Been here long?"

"About half an hour."

"Seen or heard anything suspicious in that time?"

"Not a thing. It has been as quiet as a graveyard. I was just beginning to get the horrors when you came."

"All right. How long can you stop here?"

"Well, Governor, I am running a risk in being here at all. Suppose Bill starts to look me up and finds me missing?"

"You will have to report that you have been lost in the woods."

"That's what; I intend to do so. Might as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb, so perhaps I had better be lost all night."

"I think you had, but you must not go into the mill dressed as you are now."

"Think so? I may have been observed already."

"You don't think that?"

"No, I don't."

"We'll take the chance and make the change. You have everything with you?"

"Oh, yes. I am fully prepared."

"The sooner the better, then, and we will get inside and make a thorough examination of this mill."

Young King Brady then stepped back among the bushes, for if anyone was watching he did not care to have them see him make the change.

In a moment he emerged from his concealment an entirely different looking person.

There were no more rags now.

With the exception of his shoes, Harry presented an up-to-date appearance in every particular.

All this was easy, for the Bradys have methods of their own which enable them to make these lightning changes.

Shoes, however, are not so easily changed; but Harry's were not so noticeable, as he wore his trousers long.

"How do we get in?" he asked.

"I have a key to the runway door," replied Old King Brady. "That is our way."

They climbed the hill against which No. 13 was built.

Pausing a moment to peer into the dark tunnel, they started along the track of the runway and came to the door in the upper part of the mill where the cars passed through with their precious load.

"Look out we don't fall down into the ore crushers," said Harry. "Shall I get my lantern out?"

"I think you had better," replied the old detective. "I have had the place fully described to me. There is a stairs here somewhere. It is safe enough if we take reasonable care."

Opening the door with his key, Old King Brady stood aside and allowed Harry to flash his light in.

Looking down into the dark opening where the cars dumped the ore was like looking into the bottomless pit.

At the right was a ladder leading down into the mill.

"This is what they must have meant by the stairs," grumbled Old King Brady. "Rather steep, but they will take us where we want to go, I suppose. Lead on, Harry. I am moving slow."

They descended to the upper floor of the mill, where there was a staircase leading down into the stamping-room.

"Here we are," said Old King Brady; "and now to make a thorough examination of this place. If there are any ghosts lying around loose we must lasso them, at all events we are here to solve the mystery of Mill No. 13."

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOSTS OF MILL NO. 13.

The upper floor of Mill No. 13 presented nothing unusual.

There was the shafting, the assay and superintendent's rooms and three larger rooms provided with several cots for use of the hands.

Everything was in perfect order.

So much afraid of ghosts were the people of the neighborhood that they would not even come inside to rob, so it would seem.

Downstairs it was the same.

The Bradys visited the stamproom, engine-room, laboratory, etc., taking in everything and examining all with the greatest of care.

The machinery was not in such bad condition, having been carefully greased to protect it against rust.

In the laboratory there was a clean-up of mine cups lying on the bench, each with its golden button, waiting for the weigher; but the expensive scales under the glass case had waited long in vain for a hand to do the work.

"This, I believe, is the room where the ghost generally starts business," said Old King Brady. "Suppose we settle down here for our wait?"

"Anything you say, Governor," replied Harry. "I am getting very curious about that ghost."

"What do you say to lighting up?"

"It would attract attention."

"And might bring some of Bullion Bill's slick watchers around."

"That was the thought which was in my mind."

"On the other hand, if we don't hang out our sign, how is anyone to know that we are here and ready for business?"

"That's right, too. I'd say light, only I am afraid it may spoil my usefulness with Bullion Bill later on."

"There is something in that. I think we will try it just with our dark-lantern. We will put it here on the bench where it can be seen out of the window; that should be bait enough."

Harry so placed his lantern and stood by the bench for awhile examining a number of ore samples lying on papers, each marked with a location from which the ore had been taken.

"This ore doesn't seem to be particularly rich, Governor," he at length remarked.

"No," replied Old King Brady. "I understand that the ores of this region are generally low grade. It is the immense quantity in which they occur that makes the value. By modern processes they are able to work these low-grade ores to a large profit."

"Same as at the famous Homestake mine at Lead City."

"Exactly. The Homestake cost its original investors a thousand dollars. In twenty-five years over seventy-five million dollars have been taken out, and dividends have been paid every month."

"So I have heard. And these people could do the same thing?"

"I am not setting myself up as a judge of ore, Harry. If any such fortune as that existed here, I fancy the Golden Dream people would long ago have found some way of laying the ghosts of Mill No. 13."

The detectives now sat down to smoke and they continued their talk for some time.

Old King Brady then declaring that he had not had a good night's sleep in a week, threw himself upon a lounge in the corner and Harry remained on the watch alone.

It was dreary work.

Several times it seemed to him that he could hear footsteps outside in the stamping-room, and just as often he went out with the lantern to see what the sounds meant, but only to meet with failure.

Ten o'clock came and Old King Brady was still asleep, when suddenly there was something doing in good earnest.

Harry had placed the lantern on the bench in the laboratory and was standing leaning upon it reading an old newspaper which he had picked up, when he suddenly heard a harsh, rasping voice behind him exclaim:

"Good-evening, friend. I am sorry to disturb you, but can you tell me where I left my head?"

Cold chills shot down Young King Brady's spine, his heart seemed to stand still as he faced about.

There was nothing to be seen.

The door leading out into the stamping-room, which he had closed, was still closed.

"Who spoke?" cried Harry, and as he said it Old King Brady sprang to his feet.

"What's doing?" he exclaimed, in a whisper. "Did I dream it or did I hear a strange voice?"

"It was no dream, Governor! The fun has begun. We want to get a move on now."

"What was it? What was said? What did you see?"

"I saw nothing. I was reading the paper here when somebody called out 'good-evening,' and wanted to know if I knew where he had left his head!"

"Ho!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "The headless man! He's one of the ghosts."

"Is he, indeed! You neglected to mention the party. I understood you to say that it was a beautiful young lady with whom we had to deal."

"There is a headless man, too. He is the ghost who was most effectual in scaring off the miners and mill men. It was too ridiculous even to consider. I thought it a mere invention, and so did not mention it."

"But we are up against it now, and it must be investigated all the same."

"Decidedly. Let us go right at it. Come!"

Old King Brady seized the dark-lantern and strode toward the door.

Harry, drawing his revolver, followed.

But the stamping-room was exactly as they had last seen it.

Not until they reached the foot of the stairs was there anything doing, and then all in an instant they were startled by a flash of light from above.

"Hold on!" breathed Old King Brady. "We are up against it now."

They waited, silent and breathless.

The light seemed to flash through the different rooms above, and yet they could only catch its reflection on the wall.

Suddenly it grew brighter and remained stationary, and then all at once a tall figure stood at the head of the stairs.

It was a man dressed in black clothes.

The figure was perfect, except for the head.

They could see the collar and tie, but the space above was vacant.

Then at the same instant the voice was heard again.

"Good-evening, friends. Pardon me for disturbing you, but can you tell me where I have left my head?"

It was startling, of course; but the Bradys are well used to this sort of thing.

Not a doubt existed in the mind of either of the detectives that this was a fraud simply enough when they

"I don't know where your head is, but I am coming up to help you find it!" shouted Old King Brady.

With the lantern in one hand and his revolver in the other the old detective went bounding up the stairs.

The ghost vanished like a shot and the light went with him.

The Bradys made the rounds of the upper floor again, but without discovering anything to explain what they had seen.

"Come! this beats the band!" exclaimed Harry. "What about it now?"

"Fraud!" said Old King Brady, emphatically.

"Of course, but how is it done?"

"Secret passages."

"I haven't the least doubt of that, but how about the head?"

"There wasn't any head. The gentleman was looking for it, as I understand the case."

"Pshaw, Governor! Give us an explanation; a theory, anyhow."

"A black cloth pulled over the head and carefully tucked in under the collar would produce just such an appearance, Harry."

"But would it now?"

"Of course it would. Stop and think."

"But the light would have shown the deception."

"Nothing of the sort. That is just where you were not observant."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, the light which was flashed everywhere before we saw the ghost was very carefully confined to the floor after he put in an appearance. Up above where his head should have been, and was, of course, was entirely thrown into the shadow. I tell you it is easily enough explained."

But Harry was still doubtful and they were yet deep in their discussion, when a piercing scream rang out from below.

"No. 2!" cried Old King Brady. "That's the young lady with the bleeding heart."

"Heavens! It is enough to give one the horrors! Shall we go down?"

"Hold on! You are getting superstitious."

"No, I'm not."

"You are. Stop it. Wait now. Let her sing out again."

Perhaps Old King Brady's remark had been heard.

At all events at that very instant a woman's voice started singing below.

The song was low and plaintive, but the voice was firm and carried the air well. The words of the song could not be distinguished from where the detectives stood.

"Downstairs with you, Harry!" Old King Brady whispered. "Softly, now! Just as softly as you can!"

They sneaked down halfway, where they could obtain a view of the stamping-room and the laboratory door.

There stood the "ghost" directly in the doorway!

The figure this time was that of a young girl with long black hair hanging down over the shoulders of the loose

white dress she wore. Upon the left side, directly over the heart, was a red splash like a stain of fresh blood.

She did not appear to look at the detectives, her eyes were raised and her head thrown back.

Now the words of her song could be heard, but not understood.

She was singing in some foreign tongue.

"Forward!" breathed Old King Brady. "Let us see how near we can get to her."

But he got nowhere, for the instant he began to descend the figure vanished.

There was no light this time except such as came from the detectives' lanterns.

Whether the girl backed into the laboratory or glided in among the machinery it was impossible to tell, but at all events the Bradys could discover no trace of her when they got down to the floor below, although they searched everywhere.

"I guess the show is over for the night," remarked Old King Brady, after they had waited more than an hour in the stamping-room and the laboratory.

"They haven't scared us off, however," said Harry. "When they see that, like enough they will try again. Shall we pull out or shall we wait?"

"We may as well wait. Neither of us can find our way around among these hills in the dark. Just as soon as it is daylight you had better skin out and get back to Black Creek."

"And you?"

"I shall remain in this neighborhood for a day or two. I shall want to get a report of your doings, of course. Besides, I want to see how this place looks by daylight; meanwhile you better take your turn on the lounge while I stand watch."

This plan was carried out and the Bradys put in the balance of the night in Mill No. 13.

They saw no more ghosts, but along toward four o'clock Harry was awakened by the sound of a thunderous knocking upstairs.

It was as if men were pounding on the floor with heavy hammers, and the whole building shook.

The moment the detectives started upstairs to investigate, the sounds ceased, and when they reached the floor above they could discover nothing.

Such was the troublous night which the Bradys put in at Mill No. 13.

Next morning Harry started for Black Creek.

Through the window he was able to crawl into his room behind the saloon where he had secured lodgings, and when the bartender came in at eight o'clock to awaken him Harry was not only in bed, but actually asleep.

The bartender, a pleasant young man, did not appear to have the slightest suspicion that he had not been in bed all night, for one could get into the corridor off of which the lodging-rooms opened without entering the saloon at all.

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY INITIATED INTO BULLION BILL'S BAND.

That Old King Brady had undertaken a most dangerous task Harry felt convinced as he thought over the events of the night.

The thing which worried him most was the fear that he had been seen and recognized by some of the agents of Bullion Bill, but when, after breakfast, he met the King of Black Creek on the street he was particularly pleasant to him, although he only stopped to speak a few words.

Harry put in the morning lounging about town, taking pains to show himself everything.

He made such cautious inquiries about Bullion Bill as he could without exciting suspicion, and among other things he learned that the man had a strongroom in the building back of the Grubstake saloon where he kept his bullion.

That Bullion Bill was a man of method was evident.

The holiday was over and he was now getting down to business.

At ten o'clock Harry saw him mount a fine horse and ride away.

He was told that he was off for Mill No. 1, or the Golden Dream, to make arrangements for the purchase of another lot of bullion at an early date.

About noon Harry took to the hills again and paid a second visit to Mill No. 13.

The place was just as he had found it the night before, and Old King Brady had apparently departed.

Without breaking in, Harry could not enter.

He did explore the tunnel on the hillside, however, penetrating to its end, something over three hundred feet.

Here he found the ore car belonging to the tramway and quite a store of miners' tools.

The vein was wider than the opening.

Nowhere did it appear to be very rich, but everywhere there were traces of gold.

Next came the search for the Diller ranch.

This was easily found.

It occupied a wide clearing on the slope of the hill about half a mile distant from Mill No. 13.

The building was a rough stone affair, one story high, with a long frontage and considerable depth, containing several rooms.

Young King Brady had learned at Black Creek that a number of years before a Swiss named Diller had undertaken sheep farming here, going into the business on quite a large scale.

It is said that he grew rich at it and had returned to Switzerland after selling out his claim to Bullion Bill.

Having looked over the deserted ranch, Harry next ascended the hill and found himself looking down upon another quartz mill where work was in progress.

He was taking it all in through his glass when he saw a

man approaching along the ridge and in a moment he perceived that he had come upon Old King Brady again.

"Hello! So you are here!" exclaimed the old detective, coming up. "Have you located the Diller ranch?"

"Just left it," was the reply. "How did you make out after I left you at the mill?"

"There was nothing doing after that. I stayed around until seven o'clock and then locked up and came away. Have you seen Bullion Bill since?"

"Saw him this morning—yes."

"Did he suspect your absence?"

"He didn't seem to. What are you hovering around here for?"

"Oh, I want to get the lay of the land. There is going to be something doing pretty soon, and one wants to be prepared."

"What mill is that down there in the valley?"

"That's No. 14; the ore on that side of the hill is the richest of all, so Mr. Blake, the superintendent, tells me. They have just sold ten thousand dollars' worth of bullion to your friend Bullion Bill."

"It seems to lie directly back of the Diller ranch."

"I've been measuring up distances a little, Harry. It is just halfway between the ranch and Mill No. 13."

The Bradys did some further talking and arranged for a secret meeting next morning.

During the night Old King Brady declared that he should remain among the hills probably putting in part of the time at Mill No. 13.

Harry now returned to Black Creek, noting the path carefully.

He saw nothing more of Bullion Bill.

Not up to the time that he left for the Diller ranch—half-past eight—had the King of Black Creek returned.

It was no easy matter to find one's way back to the ranch in the dark, and Young King Brady did not dare to use his lantern.

At last he reached it, however, and sat down upon the doorstep.

The place looked more dismal than in the daylight, of course, and the young detective felt that he must keep fully on the alert.

He had expected someone to meet him. It looked suspicious to find the place deserted.

"After all it may be only a trap to catch me," he thought.

He had not been long seated when the music of a guitar reached his ears.

Harry sprang to his feet and stood listening.

It surely was a guitar.

The sound appeared to come from a piece of woods on his right, and now he could hear a woman's voice singing.

It sounded most suspiciously like the singing of the ghost the night before.

"It's coming," thought Young King Brady. "I'm going to learn something now."

In a moment he caught sight of a woman emerging right from the shadow of the trees.

She held a guitar and continued to play and sing as she walked slowly across the clearing in the direction of the Diller Ranch.

Harry stood leaning against a large tree which had been left standing near the door and continued to watch her.

Just then the moon came sailing out from behind the clouds, which until now had obscured the sky.

"It's the ghost all right," thought Young King Brady. "I should know her anywhere, but I hope to gracious she don't recognize me."

The girl did not even look at him until she had come close to the hut when she suddenly threw her guitar over her back and exclaimed:

"Hello! Who are you? What's your name?"

"I'm Jack Durand," replied Harry, stepping forward.

"The name is all right," replied the girl, "and I reckon from your looks that you are all right, too. You were sent up here by Bullion Bill."

"I was."

"And I was sent to meet you. I suppose you are somewhat surprised at that?"

"A little."

"You expected to be met by a man?"

"Naturally."

"Won't I do just as well?"

"Better, perhaps. Was that you playing the guitar?"

"Sure. I don't believe there is a woman in South Dakota who can play the guitar like me."

"It's a fine instrument."

"Want to hear me play?"

"Yes, if you wish."

"What shall it be?"

"Give us a Spanish fandango."

"Don't you want me to sing?"

"If you wish."

"All right, I'll sing you 'Goodby Dolly Gray,' and give you the fandango later."

"Just as you like."

The girl seated herself on a bench which was built against the house and began tuning her guitar.

The bench was but a small affair. There was not room for two.

Harry stood by watching her.

"By the way, you haven't mentioned your name," he said, at length.

"Haven't I?" replied the girl. "Well, no; come to think of it, I haven't."

"Perhaps you don't intend to do it."

"Why not? I'm not ashamed of my name. It's Alice."

"That's only half of it."

"Never mind the other half; but say, don't stand in front of me like that. It makes me nervous to be watched. Stand in the doorway. There! That's right. Now I am going to sing."

She began the well-known song, accompanying herself fairly well.

Just as she started on the second verse Harry was suddenly seized from behind.

A strong arm was thrown about his neck and a man's knee came against the small of his back.

Not a sound had he heard—the music had been intended for no other purpose than to drown all sound, of course.

Taken unawares, the young detective was helpless.

He was bent backward and at the same instant a masked man sprang in front of him and, clapping a black bag over his head, drew it quickly down around the shoulders.

"That's yours!" cried a voice. "Now, young fellow, don't you move or speak. You will be led where we want to take you. To disobey means death!"

There was nothing for it but to yield.

Was this meant for initiation into Bullion Bill's band, or was his identity already discovered?

Naturally Young King Brady suspected the latter.

Had he been less hopeful than he was he would have given himself up for lost.

The playing and singing ceased the moment Harry was captured.

Now men began moving about Young King Brady and he was searched.

They took away a revolver and a knife.

His secret pockets were not disturbed, however, nor was the trifle of money which he carried taken.

The men did no talking among themselves.

When they were through with their search someone took Harry by the hand and said:

"We are starting now, Durand. It will pay you best to follow us quietly. Now we go."

Harry was then led out into the open and turned around several times.

This done he was led along for a considerable distance and then wheeled about three times.

Again he was led along for as much as ten minutes.

The movement was in a circle.

Suddenly he felt himself walking on boards, and he knew that he had entered a house.

Young King Brady was not deceived by all this.

The Bradys have had altogether too much experience to be fooled in any such way.

He was confident that he had been taken into the Diller Ranch.

In a moment he was treading on earth again, and a walk of perhaps three hundred feet followed.

Suddenly a deep voice called out:

"Who comes here!"

And a voice close to Young King Brady answered:

"A blind candidate who seeks admission into the band of Bullion Bill."

The following conversation then ensued:

"Whence comes he?"

"From Black Creek."

"By whose orders has he been brought here to the treasure house?"

"By the order of our noble captain."

"Has he the password and the noble captain's countersign?"

"He has not, but I have them for him."

"Advance, brother, and give the countersign."

Harry's hand was released then and he could hear a shuffling noise.

"Now give the password," the voice of the challenger said.

"A billion in bullion," was the reply.

And then came the answer:

"And that's the limit of Bullion Bill."

"Is further information required?" Harry's conductor then asked.

"No further information is required," was the reply.

"The candidate can now be brought to light."

Instantly the bag was pulled off of Harry's head.

He found himself surrounded by masked men.

All were dressed in the style of miners and all wore strips of black cloth over their faces, completely concealing their features except for the eyes which gleamed out through two holes in the mask.

The conductor, still grasping Harry's hand, led him forward toward a tall mask who stood in front of an iron door.

The place in which Harry found himself appeared to be a tunnel built in the usual style of mining tunnels, driven through earth.

The sides were lined with timber, but the door was set in rock. Apparently the tunnel ended here up against the ledge.

"What is your name?" demanded the mask in front of the door.

"Jack Durand," replied Young King Brady.

"The name is correct," replied the mask. "My orders are to admit Jack Durand. Brothers, you are now relieved of your charge. The candidate will follow me."

Turning, the mask pressed some hidden spring and the door flew back.

Harry then followed the mask through the opening and the door closed behind them.

They now found themselves in a tunnel driven through solid rock.

It extended less than fifty feet, however, ending at another door, this time of wood, upon which the mask knocked three times in a peculiar way.

There was a brief delay and then a knock was heard on the other side.

The masked man knocked twice in answer and the door was opened by Bullion Bill himself.

"Well, so you have come!" he exclaimed. "Glad to see you. Walk right in. This is our treasure-house. I am going to show you how easy it will be for me to pay you five thousand dollars for a few weeks' work."

The mask had now retreated, closing the door behind him.

The place into which Young King Brady had been intro-

duced appeared to be a natural cave of considerable size, but of no great height.

All around, piled up from floor to roof, was gold ore, heaps upon heaps of it.

The quantity was enormous. There was but a small space in the middle of the cave in which to walk.

Bullion Bill, who held a lantern, flashed it about with an air of triumph.

"There you are, young fellow!" he exclaimed. "See that ore? It is worth more than a million. Now, then, if you want to get your share of the gold it contains all you have to do is to tie to me."

"It appears to be very rich," replied Harry, hardly knowing what to say.

"Rich!" cried the King of Black Creek. "I should say it was rich. There is nothing like it in the Black Hills, and why shouldn't it be? It is the cream of the ore taken from one of the richest veins on the Golden Dream. It has taken two years to collect it, and now the time has come when it is to be turned into bullion. It is to help out that operation that we want your aid. Are you ready to go in on the deal?"

"Yes," replied Young King Brady, promptly.

And what else could he say?

As firmly as he had ever been convinced of anything, Harry felt then that to say no could mean nothing but death.

CHAPTER V.

OLD KING BRADY TRIES A NEW MOVE.

Old King Brady waited in vain for Harry to appear at the appointed place near Mill No. 13.

Neither that night nor for several following did Young King Brady put in an appearance.

Old King Brady grew much concerned, for he learned also that his partner had not been seen at Black Creek since the night of his appointment at the Diller ranch with Bullion Bill.

Still there was nothing to be done about it.

The very nature of their business requires the Bradys to take big chances.

Old King Brady hung around the neighborhood for a week and then went to Deadwood.

His anxiety was intense, but he still felt that there was nothing to be done.

Registering at an obscure hotel under an assumed name, Old King Brady early next morning called upon Mr. Marcus Bannister, vice president of the Golden Dream Mining Company.

Mr. Bannister was a rising young lawyer who had the advantage of a fortune left by his father to help him on in the world.

Thus, although not more than twenty-five, the young

man had been able to accumulate more than half a million in addition to twice as much inherited.

This prosperity had not by any means turned his head, however.

Old King Brady, who had not previously met him, was greatly taken by the young man.

"And now, Mr. Brady, what have you to report?" demanded Mark—we give him the name by which he was usually known among his friends—as soon as the introduction was over.

"Several things, but not at all as much as I ought to have, considering the time I have been working on the case," replied the detective, rather dejectedly.

"Have you made any real headway? Can you say that these robberies of our bullion wagons have been committed by this man Lemons?"

"I cannot."

"Have you obtained any proof of his crookedness in any line so that we can arrest him?"

"I have not."

"Have you done anything in the matter of the alleged ghosts in Mill No. 13?"

"I have, and now, Mr. Bannister, if you will allow me to tell my story I will go right at it and you will understand the case better than you do now."

"Go ahead," said Mark, leaning back in his chair.

He heard the old detective through without interruption.

"This is serious business about your partner," he said then.

"It is, very," the old detective replied.

"Do you think he is dead?"

"It's an even chance."

"Pity he could not have got back to you. His statement would have helped us a lot."

"It would have done so undoubtedly; but the boy may be all right. He was certain that Bullion Bill had no suspicion of him and hired him in good faith. It may be impossible for Harry to leave where he is now. It's an even chance if he isn't just laying back for a spring."

"But why did you leave the ground? It would seem to me most important that you should have stayed."

"My usefulness was over in the direction I was working. My instructions from the president of the Golden Dream were to watch each of the mills in turn and see what, if anything, might be doing in the way of suspicious night work. I have put in three weeks at this. I have given a night to each of the mills. You must remember, Mr. Bannister, that your property covers a great deal of ground."

"That is true. Come to the point, Mr. Brady, I see that you have something up your sleeve."

"I am ready to pull it out then. In short, I distrust Mr. Blake, the superintendent of Mill No. 13."

Mark Bannister almost jumped out of his chair.

"What!" he exclaimed. "My uncle!"

"Ha! He is your uncle, then?"

"By marriage. But that cuts no ice. My aunt is long dead. What do you know?"

"First, that each Saturday night every man connected with Mill No. 14 is allowed to go to Black Creek on a spree and not even a watchman is left behind. The men are gone all night, and don't show up again till Sunday afternoon, and then most of them are so drunk that there is very little doing on Mondays."

"That would seem to be bad discipline, but what has it to do with your case?"

"Just this. Mr. Blake remains over Saturday night at the mill, and I have watched him twice. As soon as all hands have gone he has appeared in the yard with four or five men and they have kept themselves busy all night carrying bags of ore out of the mill back into the tunnel in the hillside."

"The deuce!"

"Oh, it's true! Can you imagine any benefit coming to the Golden Dream Company by such business as that?"

"Indeed I can't! It looks like crooked work."

"It certainly does."

"And you have seen this on two Saturday nights?"

"I have."

"And on Sunday morning?"

"These men disappear. The last trip they made into the tunnel they did not come out again. Mr. Blake did, however. He went to the office and, wrapping himself in a blanket, bunked on the lounge."

"Why, he has a house of his own half a mile from the mine."

"I know, but he did not go there."

"You have seen this twice?"

"Yes."

"Did you watch over Sunday?"

"I watched until nine o'clock on both Sunday mornings. Each time Mr. Blake appeared at that hour and walked around the hill to Mill No. 13, went in there and stopped in for a couple of hours or more. About twelve o'clock he went home."

"By jove, Mr. Brady, I don't like this very well. It must be looked into."

"It certainly ought to be, and now, Mr. Bannister, this is really the only discovery of importance I have made, except the ghost business, which most certainly is a fake."

"Blake should be called to account at once."

"Is he a man of any means?"

"Not at all. He only has his salary; he is an expert mill man, though, and has been in the employ of the company ever since we started."

"Did he ever have charge of Mill No. 13?"

"Yes; that was his mill until these troubles began."

"Does he believe in the ghosts?"

"Well, he claims to. He is very superstitious."

"Or pretends to be. He don't seem to be a bit afraid of stopping in No. 13 a couple of hours at a time in the daytime."

"You have no idea what he is doing there?"

"Not the slightest. You see, the doors and windows in front are all boarded up and after he enters by the door

at the runway he locks it behind him. Of course, I have a key, but he left his in the lock both times, and so mine wouldn't work. I did not think it best to try to break in."

"He must be made to explain his operations at once," said Mark, decidedly. "Shall I telephone for him to come to Deadwood? What would you advise?"

"The utmost secrecy. I miss my partner's help. I dare not employ anyone at the mines or anyone at Black Creek. If I had a good, determined fellow like yourself now to lend me a hand for a few nights there would be something doing. I need someone with authority—like yourself."

"Well, I can go, I suppose," replied Mark, after a little thought. "It would inconvenience me some, but that cuts no ice. The matter is very important. If it was anyone but Uncle Joe I should say at once that we were being robbed of ore, but I can't believe it of him."

"I tell you, Mr. Bannister, that someone is working up that ghost business at No. 13," said Old King Brady, emphatically. "Is it being done for the benefit of the Golden Dream Mining Company? I guess not."

"Settled," said Mark. "I go. When shall it be and where shall we meet?"

"It shall be Saturday next, and we had best meet at Mill 13 or near there. Do you know the old Diller ranch?"

"Perfectly."

"Then let that be the place, but you must not drive there, neither must you go without disguise."

"Right! Six o'clock on Saturday at the Diller ranch, then. You can look for a solitary miner. That will be me."

Having made this arrangement, Old King Brady returned to the neighborhood of the Golden Dream.

The old detective was having a hard time of it.

He did not dare to stop at Black Creek, so he had to sleep around in deserted huts and even in the woods, cooking for himself and often going without proper food, or, in other words, leading the life of a tramp.

And indeed he bore a very strong resemblance to a tramp when on Saturday evening he came wandering up to the old Diller ranch at a little after six o'clock.

The place wore its usual air of desertion.

Old King Brady had been there many times, but had never yet seen anyone near the house.

Now, however, a young man came promptly out of the building and called him by name.

It was Mark Bannister.

He was roughly dressed, wearing an old pair of trousers, a miner's blue shirt and a dirty white felt hat, while his coat, all out at the elbows, went a long way to help out his disguise.

"So you have come at last," he exclaimed. "I've been here an hour. I almost wish we had made the meeting place somewhere else."

"For why? What's up?"

"We'll be up spout if we don't get out of this right quick. Here, slide into the woods and I'll tell you all about it."

They went back among the trees and sat down upon a stone.

"It's a good job that I didn't go directly to the ranch," said Mark. "You see, I tramped over the hill, and as I came near the ranch I saw three men coming up the path from the direction of Black Creek. They went in, but they didn't come out again. I haven't seen them since."

"Is that a fact?"

"It is. I came down here and examined the building pretty thoroughly. I'll be hanged if I can make out what became of them. After that I thought I would go into the woods and watch for you. I hadn't been there but a few minutes before who should come along but a thundering pretty girl and a young fellow with her. Both carried baskets which appeared to be loaded with provisions. They did precisely the same trick."

"Went into the ranch and didn't come out again?"

"Exactly."

"How long ago was this?"

"About ten minutes."

"You followed them in?"

"After a minute or two."

"It would almost have been better if you hadn't."

"But, Mr. Brady, we must do something."

"That's so. Very likely I should have done the same thing. I must have another look at the interior of that house."

"You have been in there?"

"Half a dozen times. Mind you, it was here that my partner disappeared. What you tell me only goes to confirm my suspicion that there is some underground connection between this place and Mill No. 14."

"You mean No. 13?"

"No, I don't. I mean just what I say."

"But Mill No. 14 is a mile from here."

"Is it? I say not. You speak of the distance by the path over the hill. Evidently you have not carefully examined into the lay of the land."

"I bow to you, Mr. Brady. I spoke of the distance by the path."

"On second thought I believe I will postpone examining the ranch. It is a puzzle, and we don't want to waste time. Let us get right over to my rock from which I have been in the habit of watching Mill No. 14."

They partly made the circuit of the stone house through the woods, coming in a moment to a place where the bushes were very thick.

Beyond was a thick growth of trees with almost no underbrush.

"I never was here before," exclaimed Mark. "Surely we are not going in the direction of No. 14."

"Oh, but we are," replied Old King Brady. "Just wait and see."

They were now not over three hundred feet away from the Diller ranch.

Ascending a little hill, they suddenly came upon a rock where they could look down into a valley of some length.

Here stood Mill No. 14, with its outlying buildings directly below them.

"There you are!" exclaimed Old King Brady.

"You have made no allowance for the turn of the valley; you have an entirely wrong idea of the lay of the land."

"By jove, you are right then!" exclaimed Mark, "so the tunnel runs under the ground we have come over."

"It does. It is in the hill over three hundred feet, and that brings it within two hundred feet of the Diller ranch if its strike takes the direction I believe."

"It beats the band. I never would have believed it; but say, won't we be seen here?"

"No danger if we lie down flat and keep in the shadow of this boulder. You take notice that you don't see anyone down there."

"Not a soul!"

"It is as it was last Saturday night and the one before."

"Do we have to wait till nine o'clock before there is anything doing?"

"It was that hour both times when I watched here before. Of course we can't tell what may happen to-night; but tell me why was it that no office or other outbuildings were ever erected at No. 13?"

"Because the distance is only half a mile to No. 14 by following around the corner of the hill. The buildings there were used by both."

"As I supposed. I have not liked to make too many inquiries. The tunnels at the two mills tap the same ore body."

"They must. How came they to be built so near together, these mills?"

"Why, No. 14 couldn't do all the work. The yield is immense. We either had to enlarge or build in a new place."

"Then No. 14 was built first."

"Built before any of the other mills. They have been renumbered, you see. No. 13 was actually the last mill built. I think—hello! There he is now!"

"Blake!"

"Yes; see him?"

"Yes, yes! He isn't going for the tunnel this time, though."

"No, by jove, he is following the path which leads to Mill No. 13."

CHAPTER VI.

AT NO. 14.

As long as Young King Brady is among the missing the explanation of the mystery of his absence may as well be postponed for another chapter, considering the importance of the work in which Old King Brady and the vice president of the Golden Dream were now engaged.

They soon lost sight of Superintendent Blake, for the

winding path led him into the woods and he disappeared among the trees.

"What is to be done now?" inquired Mark. "Do we go to No. 13?"

"No. We could not reach it through the woods as quick as he can by the path. There can hardly be a doubt that he intends to go there. It seems to me that this is a grand chance for us to have a look around the mine."

"We could be down there in five minutes; if you are only sure that there is no one around."

"If I wasn't I would never suggest going. I have not been in the tunnel. I am most curious to pay it a visit, and it seems to me that now is the time."

"I'll go you. Come on! Seems strange, don't it, for a fellow to be beating about the bush so when it comes to his own property?"

By descending the steep hill at the risk of breaking their necks, Mark Bannister and the detective were soon walking about the millyard at No. 14.

It was just as Old King Brady had said, the place was deserted.

Here there was no boarding-house, the miners occupying a row of log cabins built against the side of the hill.

"We will make straight for the tunnel," said Old King Brady. "If we are caught we shall have to declare ourselves, that's all."

"But you don't expect him back under a couple of hours?" questioned Mark.

"He stayed that length of time on both the other occasions, that is all I can say."

"For heaven sake! let us be quick! What about a light?"

"I have my dark-lantern. That will answer every purpose. I don't really expect to learn anything by this move, but I am bound to try it."

They climbed the steep path which led up to the tunnel and peered in.

"Black as midnight," said Mark. "We can never discover anything here."

"Let us push ahead, at all events," replied the detective. "It is our chance, and we want to make the most of it."

It seemed a long walk to the end of the tunnel.

Old King Brady flashed his lantern right and left and made the best examination of the walls that he could under such hurried conditions.

There was nothing to indicate the existence of a secret door or anything of that sort.

They had almost reached the end when Old King Brady suddenly shut off the light.

"Thunder! What are you about?" exclaimed Mark.

"Hush! Don't breathe! Don't you hear that music?" the detective whispered.

"Yes, yes! Somebody playing on the banjo."

"No, guitar."

"You are right. What can it mean?"

"Just what we want to find out. Hold on now! An idea strikes me. Let us push ahead to the ore car and

crawl in. There may be something doing here in a minute."

The ore car was but just beyond where they had halted.

Groping their way to it, they climbed in as noiselessly as possible.

Here, by lying down flat, it was possible to conceal themselves from anyone passing, providing they were not seized with the notion to look into the car.

Still the music continued.

It was heard in a muffled way, and Old King Brady was soon able to locate the sound as coming from behind the wall of the tunnel on the left.

Mark was inclined to dispute this. He declared that the sounds were dead ahead.

He was still talking about it when all at once the music burst out louder and a light flashed at the end of the tunnel.

"Are you going to leave us now, boys!" a voice called out. Old King Brady caught his breath.

The voice was Harry's!

The music now ceased.

"Yes, we've got to get down to business," someone replied. "Aren't you coming with us, Jack?"

"No; I hadn't any order to that effect. I was told to stand guard here."

"What's the odds? Blake is down at the mill."

"My rule is to obey orders even if I break owners."

"Oh, you are going to stop and flirt with Alice—that's what," was the half-sneering reply.

"You bet he isn't!" a woman's voice called. "You fellows go and do your work. I'm going down to the mill."

Now the light came flashing along the tunnel and Old King Brady could hear the footfalls of two men.

They were talking together and in ordinary tones.

As they drew near the listeners caught these words:

"Say, Tom, it will cause a deuce of an excitement when the mill goes up. Blame me if I see the use."

"The boss ought to know best. He is determined to do it."

"He's making a mistake all the same, I say; it's my belief that this racket can be worked twice."

"Ah, boy, but the boss is afraid of Blake. That's the reason. He is determined that the man shall die. I only wish it was old Tully of No. 10. He's a hard one; Blake was always good to his men."

They passed the ore car then, having all they could do to crowd between it and the wall.

Old King Brady did not dare to raise his head.

The conversation ceased and soon the footsteps of the pair began to die away.

"Heavens, Mr. Brady, this means murder!" gasped Mark.

"You see, I was right. My uncle isn't in it after all!"

"I see nothing of the sort," replied the old detective.

"The matter is as plain as a pikestaff. Bullion Bill, or whoever else the boss may be, has got through with your uncle's services and proposes to do him up, that's all."

"And they mean to dynamite the mill?"

"Certainly. You heard."

"But are we to stay here and let these wretches have it all their own way?"

"For a minute, yes. It isn't safe to move just yet. You don't imagine they mean to dynamite the mill now, with your uncle absent? No, no! They are merely going to lay the train."

"And you will stop them?"

"On the contrary, I shall allow them to finish their work. By the way, that was my partner who was left behind with the girl."

"You are sure?"

"How can I be otherwise, since he spoke in his natural voice; but come, now is our time. It strikes me that we are going to have plenty of business on hand to-night."

They climbed down from the car and crept out of the tunnel.

It was now getting dark, and it was easy to find a place to hide where from the slope of the hill they could see what was going on below.

Underneath the back of the mill it was all open, for the rise of the hill was steeper here than at No. 13.

The two men were at work there with their lantern.

They were placing a row of dynamite cartridges by burying them partway in the loose soil.

Attached to the cartridges was a fuse which they brought out and hid the end under a flat stone.

All being completed, then the two men came out from under the mill, where they had been scraping up earth so as to completely conceal the cartridges.

"That will fix old Blake and knock the best mill on the Golden Dream six ways for Sunday," they heard one of them exclaim.

"You are not going back?" said the other. "You are going to No. 13."

"Sure! What's the use of going back? There is nobody around."

They went on down the hill, crossed the open space in front of the mill and disappeared along the path leading to No. 13.

"We'll soon knock that little game!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "No use in laying trains while we are around."

He fumbled in one of his secret pockets and produced a pair of nippers.

Crawling under the mill with Mark to hold the light, Old King Brady cut the fuse away from each cartridge and then carefully restored the loose earth as he had found it.

"There!" he exclaimed. "That fills the bill. Now let us make a strike for Mill No. 13."

"Then you don't intend to go back and look up the secret door and find your partner?" demanded Mark, in some surprise.

"Not I! It is enough to know that Harry is alive. He'll take care of himself all right if he has managed to hold his end this long."

"He must be a sharp one."

"That's what he is."

"I should like to meet him."

"Probably you will have the chance before long. It looks to me as though this case was closing in pretty fast."

"But what can be their idea in trying to blow up this property. It beats me why they should want to destroy so valuable a plant which is giving them a chance to rob the company every day, according to you."

The old detective made no reply.

He saw that Mark was one of those who would never let up on a subject once he got started.

Taking the path which led around the end of the hill, Old King Brady started for No. 13.

"Keep as close to the trees as possible," he said to Mark. "If there is any way of avoiding it we don't want to be seen."

There was little talking done after that.

As they drew near the mill Old King Brady dodged into the woods and began climbing the hill.

"We'll strike it in the rear," he said. "It will never do to come right up in front; more than likely they have someone on guard."

At the top of the rise the detective halted again.

"Do you hear anything, Mr. Bannister?" he whispered.

"It would almost seem as if the mill was running."

"You think you can hear the stamps?"

"It seems so to me. I may be mistaken, though."

"No, you are not mistaken. I hear it. I wanted to see if you did, too. They are running full blast down there, all right."

"What can it mean?"

"Why, it seems to be plain enough. They are working up the stolen gold ore into bullion."

"And Uncle Joe at the head of such operation! It seems incredible."

"Nothing incredible about it, my friend. A man never knows the true inwardness about his own relations. He thinks of them just the opposite to what they really are in nine cases out of ten."

"I'll know the truth about Uncle Joe if it takes a leg."

"It will be quickest learned by our getting down to the top of the tunnel where we can get a look at No. 13, and let me advise absolute silence. These fellows must have their watchers out, and there may be some of them here on this hill."

They sneaked on toward the brow of the hill where the runaway from the tunnel was.

All this time the sounds of the working machinery were distinctly heard, and what was more, they could see the reflection of lights upon the trees.

Then in an instant a sharp, piercing whistle rang out.

"All done," said Old King Brady. "We are discovered."

They waited, listening breathlessly.

Now not a sound was to be heard.

Soon venturing forward they stood on top of the tunnel and looked down upon Mill No. 13.

It was hard to believe that there was any business doing there, for all was dark and as silent as the grave.

CHAPTER VII.

WORKING FOR BULLION BILL.

Young King Brady's experiences during that week after he was initiated into Bullion Bill's secrets must now be related.

After exhibiting the great piles of gold ore to his new recruit, Bullion Bill whistled and the masked men came through the secret door.

"We will have to blindfold you again, Jack," said Bullion Bill. "Our rule is that for a new recruit one month must pass before he is fully initiated into our secrets or allowed to leave us. We don't want you to consider yourself a prisoner, but at the same time I advise you as a friend not to pull out until you get the word."

Harry assured him that he had no such intention, and he was then led out of the treasure-room and, as near as he could figure it, through several underground passages.

At last when the halt came and the bag was pulled off his head, Young King Brady found himself in just the situation he expected.

He was in a cave fitted up for the use of this crooked band.

The cave appeared to be of considerable size.

It was divided into several rooms separated from each other by heavy curtains hung from iron rods.

There was no masking here.

Young King Brady found himself in the largest of these cave-rooms surrounded by ten young men, several of whom he remembered to have seen at Black Creek.

All shook hands with him and gave him a word of welcome.

A blazing fire over against the wall of the cave made the place bright and cheerful, the smoke being carried off in some mysterious way did not interfere with the comfort of these young cave-dwellers in the least.

Bullion Bill was not present, nor was the girl Alice.

"And now, Jack, you want to make yourself at home," said a big, strapping young fellow who had been introduced to Harry under the name of Tom Clegg. "There's no work till to-morrow night. All you have to do is to eat, sleep and make yourself happy. If you want to take a hand in a game of poker there will be something doing in that line in a few minutes. If you play the banjo, I've got one, although I can't play it very well. If you know any good stories to-night will be the time to tell them, and so, as I said before, just make yourself at home."

Harry found the boys a jolly set, although they were mostly of the rough-and-tumble sort.

As it happens, Young King Brady is a fine performer on the banjo, has a good voice and knows how to use it.

Tom Clegg brought out his instrument and Harry soon had all hands around him listening to his playing and singing.

This lasted for awhile and then the poker game was started.

It was a penny-ante affair; nobody seemed to have much money, and Harry joined in.

The play lasted till midnight. There was no drinking.

Tom Clegg informed Young King Brady that no liquor was allowed while they were "on duty," as he termed it; but that every Thursday all hands went to Black Creek, where they got whatever they wanted at the Grubstake free.

When the game broke up Harry was conducted to one of the rooms partitioned off by the curtain, where there was a mattress thrown down with pillows and plenty of blankets.

It was a relief to find that he was going to have the place to himself.

Tom Clegg informed him that each had their own room.

Next morning Harry was up by seven o'clock, and, pushing aside the curtain, he walked back to the main cave where he had spent the evening with the boys.

Here a long table had been set for breakfast.

It was formed by boards laid along on mason's horses, with chairs set for twelve.

Back in the recesses of the cave a light could be seen and the savory smell of cooking beefsteak filled the place.

Presently the girl Alice appeared, carrying a huge platter of bread and a dish of butter.

"Hello!" she exclaimed. "So you have waked up, have you? We shall soon have some breakfast. Say, you play the banjo fine. I thought I knew something about it, but you beat me."

"Oh, it's nothing," replied Harry. "You can do the same on the guitar."

"Can you play a guitar, Jack?"

"A little."

"I'd like to bet you know more about it than I do. Mebbe you will get a chance to show me by and by, but I must go now, for here comes my mother. She don't like to see me talking to the boys."

Alice vanished then, and in a minute a woman appeared carrying a panful of apples, one of which she put at each plate.

She was a dejected-looking person, and Harry, as he stood by the fire, saw that she bore a strong resemblance to Bullion Bill.

In a moment she had vanished without speaking a word, and indeed scarcely glancing at Harry.

A little later she reappeared ringing a bell furiously.

This soon brought the boys to breakfast, and a very good one it proved to be.

They were waited upon by the woman, and Harry saw nothing more of Alice that day.

All through the morning and on until night there was nothing doing at the cave.

The poker playing was resumed, the boys told stories and there was music, with an excellent dinner at noon and supper about six o'clock.

It was about as slow a day as Harry had ever put in, and one full of anxiety, too, for he dreaded discovery at any moment.

It is no light matter to put oneself into the power of one of these Western gangs.

Immediately after supper Bullion Bill put in an appearance, and then everybody got busy.

The King of Black Creek led the boys through a long underground passage which appeared to have been an old mine tunnel, and after one or two turns they passed into the treasure-room.

Here a door was opened into another tunnel.

The door was an ingeniously-contrived affair consisting of a wooden frame into which rough pieces of stone had been cemented.

Seen from the other side, as Young King Brady afterwards learned, it bore such a close resemblance to the wall of the tunnel that only a very sharp person could have detected the fraud.

Through this tunnel the men were hurried, and in a moment they came out upon a quartz mill, where they were met by an elderly man whom Bullion Bill addressed as "Boss Blake."

Then what Old King Brady had seen took place.

For three hours the men carried bags of gold ore from Mill No. 14 to the treasure-room, where it was dumped with the rest.

And yet so great was the supply of ore at No. 14 that what was taken was scarcely missed.

The work was over by ten o'clock and the boys returned to the treasure-room, Boss Blake closing the door behind them.

Harry supposed that they were through, but it proved to be nothing of the sort.

Bullion Bill now opened another door at the side of the treasure-room, disclosing still another tunnel.

This was a narrow affair and appeared to be more recent than the one leading from the cave.

It was only about two hundred feet long, and it led them into a remote part of their cave, which they crossed, halting then before still another door.

This Bullion Bill opened and Harry saw that they had come into Mill No. 13.

But they had not come empty-handed.

Each man had brought his bag of ore along.

The contents of these bags were tumbled into the receivers of the great crushers, and while Harry and two others returned to the treasure-room for more, Bullion Bill and the rest began to prepare for business.

Fire was built under the boilers in the engine-room, the greased machinery was carefully wiped and everything put in readiness for work.

As he came and went with his precious load, Harry saw and learned a lot.

Tom Clegg, who worked with him, had grown more communicative now, and it was easy to pump him up to a certain point.

When at last, away along in the small hours of the morning, Harry got back to bed, he felt that he understood the whole game.

Boss Blake was robbing the Golden Dream at No. 14, and with Bullion Bill's help was working up the ore in Mill No. 13.

One of the men who had worked with Harry was an expert chemist, so it appeared; others were skilled mill men who knew their business.

Everything pointed to the idea that Bullion Bill was preparing to get away with the great mass of gold ore in the treasure-room just as soon as possible, for Harry learned that the mill was to be run all day Sunday and up to Monday noon, after which it would be closed down until the next Saturday night.

During the week which followed Young King Brady and the others were kept busy each day, and Harry felt that he had pretty well gained the confidence of the gang.

The bullion turned out in that Sunday's run was carefully packed in boxes, more ore was carried down from the treasure-room and placed in the upper cave close to the door leading into Mill No. 13.

In this way the treasure-room was emptied during that week.

Harry now knew that the grand clean-up was to be made during the week following, when it was intended to run Mill No. 13 continuously with a guard stationed in the woods around it ready to shoot anyone who ventured near.

What the yield in gold was expected to be Young King Brady could not learn, but he knew that it was enormous.

From remarks dropped by Bullion Bill himself he knew also that this deal was to be the last, and that once the bullion was delivered at Deadwood all hands were to separate.

Bill spoke of going to Europe, and twice he asked Harry how he would like to go with him.

Further, Young King Brady learned that Tom Clegg had played the headless ghost, arranging the deception just as Old King Brady had imagined.

Alice had done the singing ghost's part, of course.

Harry learned that the woman who acted as cook was Alice's mother and the sister of Bullion Bill.

And thus by his shrewdness in working in with the gang, Young King Brady had completely solved the mystery.

Only thing was to get away, connect with his chief and thus make some use of the information he had gained; but this was by no means an easy thing to do, for there were three of his companions who, although they worked with the rest, were constantly watching.

Tom Clegg declared that they were Bill's particular enemies, and that they had standing orders to shoot anyone who attempted to break the rules of the band.

Thus matters stood when, on the next Saturday, Old King Brady and Marcus Bannister took a hand in the game.

Bullion Bill appeared not to have the least suspicion that the detectives were after him.

As for the visit Old King Brady and Harry had paid to Mill 13 on the night the "ghosts" appeared, it had been several times discussed in Young King Brady's presence, and he knew that they were supposed to have been only a couple of tramps.

Late on that Saturday afternoon while Harry, Tom Clegg and a man named Bill Burke were at work in the upper cave sorting ore ready to charge the big crushing machines later, Alice suddenly appeared among them carrying her guitar slung over her shoulder and a lantern in her hand.

All three looked up in surprise, for the girl did not often show herself, although Harry had been told that whenever Bullion Bill for any reason could not come up from Black Creek to look after his own business he always sent his orders by special messenger to his niece, and that she made it her business to see that they were carried out.

"Hello, Tom!" cried Alice, "Hello Bill and hello to you, Jack Durand. Orders are that you are to quit work here in an hour and get up to No. 14."

"What's that for?" demanded Tom Clegg.

"Here are your orders written out," replied Alice, handing Tom a letter. "Jack has different ones, and I am to give him his at another time."

Tom took the letter and, holding it up to the light of the hanging lantern overhead, hurriedly read it.

"For heaven sake!" he exclaimed. "What is Bullion Bill up to now? Say, Bill, we are to put seven sticks of dynamite under Mill 14 and lay a train so that the blamed old place can be blown to pieces any time."

Here was serious business.

Murder was evidently in the wind.

"That's all right, anything the boss says goes," growled Burke.

But Harry said nothing.

Alice had tipped him the wink and Young King Brady was waiting, wondering what his orders were going to be.

CHATER VIII.

THE BRADYS UNITED AGAIN.

"If anyone was running that mill they have stopped work mighty sudden," Mark Bannister exclaimed.

"Hush! Not a loud word!" breathed Old King Brady. "We are discovered. That we are in the greatest danger there can be no doubt."

"You think so?" demanded Mark.

"Think so! I know it! Back to the woods, man! Not a second to be lost!"

They stepped back among the trees, retracing their steps up the hill with all speed.

Now that it is no easy matter to find one's way in the woods at night is something pretty generally known.

Mark Bannister did not seem to fully appreciate this, however.

"Come on! Come on!" he exclaimed, in a whisper. "We can run up here a little way and then lie low. If there is anyone around they will soon show themselves."

"Wait!" said Old King Brady. "Let us make sure of the lay of the land first. Keep more to the left. There should be a grove of hemlocks right here. There is no better place in which to hide."

Just then they heard voices on their left and a light was seen flashing among the trees.

"Halt!" whispered Old King Brady. "We are in for it. We have been seen and they are searching for us."

"What is to be done?"

"Keep on as you are going. We will strike back over the hill toward No. 14."

They kept on for a short time.

The light seemed to follow them, but there was no calling out.

At last the light went up in the air as if someone had hung a lantern on the branch of a tree.

After that it did not move.

"They have halted, whoever they are," said Old King Brady; "let us wait here a minute and see what comes next."

They waited for some time, but the light did not alter its position.

"Wait here, Mr. Bannister," said the detective; "I will creep up to the place and see what is doing."

"Let me go with you."

"Not on any account. I am more used to this sort of business than you are. It is probably only a bait, but I want to know all about it. I think I might find my way back, but upon my word, I don't feel so sure of finding my way to No. 14 unless I can have a light."

Thus saying, Old King Brady hurried in the direction of the light, which was at no great distance away.

It was not absolutely dark now, for the moon had risen.

The detective carefully noted the different trees as he passed them so as to be able to find his way back again.

He had also told Mark to give an answering whistle when he whistled in case he should become mixed up.

He had hardly started before he heard Mark crashing about, breaking twigs and making a racket generally.

"Confound the man! Why can't he keep quiet?" thought the old detective. "I shall have to go back again!"

It was time!

Already the light was on the move again.

It came rapidly forward.

Old King Brady was exasperated.

The light had served its purpose as a bait and now the enemy was upon them.

Suddenly matters grew worse.

"Now there were two lights."

"They are closing in on us!" thought Old King Brady, and he started to run, whistling as he went.

Immediately Mark answered, but the whistle came from behind Old King Brady.

"Deuce take the fellow! He started to follow me and has missed it altogether," thought the old detective. "They will get him now sure!"

The next instant revolvers were banging and loud shouts were heard.

"Here he is! I've got him!"

"Have you shot him? Is he dead?"

"I reckon he is."

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"Can't tell you. Some tramp or another."

"Kill him! It's the boss's orders! Don't hold back!"

"He's fixed as it is. Come on! They are waiting for the word down at No. 13. Boss Blake will be as mad as thunder if he has to keep shut down for long."

The second light had rejoined the first now, and both moved off in the direction of the mill.

Old King Brady was in despair.

"If they have killed that man I've got a bag of trouble on my hands," he thought. "Why in thunder couldn't he stay where I left him? It is so hard to work with a person not used to this business of ours."

He waited until the lights had disappeared and then started to find Mark.

This meant a good half hour's hunt, for Old King Brady got turned around in fine shape, too.

In self-defense he had to use his dark-lantern.

This, however, seemed to attract no attention, for all was still in the woods now.

At last, just as he was about to give up in despair, Old King Brady heard a faint voice calling:

"Mr. Brady! Is that you?"

It was an immense relief.

"That you, Mr. Bannister?" answered the detective.

"Yes," was the reply. "Come on as you are. I can see you, although you don't see me!"

"Are you much hurt?"

"I have been shot. I don't think it is serious, though. I saw your light moving about, but I didn't dare to call before, for I thought it might be the enemy. Come right on!"

In a moment Old King Brady was right up to him.

Mark sat under a tall pine looking rather sick.

"I got it in the shoulder," he said. "I fired back, but I must have missed. If I hadn't fainted it would have been all day with me, I guess. They must have thought I was dead."

"But why did you move? I don't want to reproach you, Mr. Bannister, but why could you not have stayed still, as I told you?"

"I wanted to be in it, Mr. Brady, that's all. I thought I could follow you without your knowing it and so be on hand in case of trouble."

"You have got the trouble all right."

"And have knocked out our work for to-night, I suppose."

"Never mind. Let us see how badly you are hurt. We seem to have this place to ourselves now."

Placing the lantern on the ground, Old King Brady assisted Mark to bare his wound.

It was by no means serious.

With the point of his knife the old detective was able to pick out the bullet.

Bleeding had already ceased, and after the wound had been bound up Mark declared that he felt able to get on the move.

"The thing is to get off this hill, and I don't care so much which side we do it on," said Old King Brady; "but I'll set my compass for No. 14."

They pushed on slowly, for Mark felt decidedly weak.

It was only a few minutes before they came out into the open.

Below them in the valley a light could be seen burning.

"That's 14," said Mark, decidedly.

"Sure?" asked the old detective.

"Positive."

"How do you tell?"

"By the shape of the building. Come on."

They descended the hill, coming presently to the tunnel, and then they knew they were right.

"It must be that Uncle Joe has returned," said Mark. "I am feeling mighty weak. Mr. Brady, I wish you could make up your mind to tackle him. Arrest him and I'll make him confess. It will give me a chance to pull myself together, at all events."

"It will spoil everything," said the old detective. "What we want is to catch these fellows red-handed and break up the whole gang. We have evidence enough now to show that there is crooked work in progress. I say, let us get over to No. 1 and collect a force of miners and then descend upon these people in the early morning. You say the superintendent of No. 1 is to be depended upon?"

"Absolutely, but it's five miles there. I can never walk it."

"Can you ride a horse?"

"I think I could."

"Then it would be worth our while to look in the barn and see if there isn't at least one left. But you stop here and I'll push on to the mill and find out what that light means."

"That will be better," replied Mark, dropping down upon a rock. "I am so tired now that I feel as if I could not go another step."

"You won't fool me this time, then?"

"Indeed no. You may depend upon me."

"Then I am off!"

The old detective hurried down the hill.

The light shone from the window of the office of the mill, which in this case was in the building itself.

Creeping up, Old King Brady peered in.

A lamp was burning on the desk, but there was no one visible.

Old King Brady waited some time, expecting to see someone put in an appearance, but no one did.

"I shall have to get inside there and investigate," he thought. "Perhaps it's only another bait."

He tried the door and it yielded to his touch.

As he stepped inside there was a rustle without and a girl came in through the door.

"Oh, Mr. Blake!" she exclaimed. "I came to——"

Then there was a scream, and if Old King Brady had not been quick she would have escaped him.

He sprang forward, caught her by the shoulder and slung her roughly into the office.

Instantly the girl drew a revolver from the folds of her dress.

"I'll fix you!" she cried, but the detective was too quick for her and struck the revolver from the girl's hand.

"None of that!" he exclaimed, drawing his own weapon and covering the girl. "Who are you and what brings you here at this hour of the night?"

It was Alice, of course.

Old King Brady instantly recognized her as the ghost.

"It's none of your business, and I won't tell you," whined the girl. "I warn you, though! I have friends close at hand. You are as good as dead if you attempt to interfere with me."

"No one proposes to harm you, miss. What's your name?" said Old King Brady. "You will give an account of yourself, though, just the same."

"I won't do it for you."

"Very well! Then look out for trouble!"

"What trouble, you old tramp? I am going to scream. Then wait and see."

Old King Brady saw but one thing to do.

He could not let the girl go to give the alarm to the rest of the gang. It was absolutely necessary to hold her.

Quick as thought he whipped out a pair of handcuffs, flung himself upon the girl, backed her against the wall and, in spite of her struggles, clapped the bracelets on."

Now, no man can do the handcuff act any better than Old King Brady.

It took him but a few seconds to accomplish his purpose, but he could not stop the girl's screams.

They were not answered.

Backing away, Old King Brady caught his breath.

"You think you are awful smart!" snarled Alice. "I know who you are."

"Well, who?"

"A detective. You must be."

"Why must I be?"

"Because you carry handcuffs."

"Stick to your idea. I have got you, all right. I daresay you are one of the gang who mean to blow up this mill to-night."

"What—what do you mean?"

"You know well enough, and now give an account of yourself or look for lots of trouble ahead."

"What trouble can you make me, I'd like to know?"

"Sit down in that chair."

"I won't. What do you mean to do?"

"Sit down before I force you to. I mean to put you in such a position that you can't interfere with my plans, and I shall do it, too. Ha! Some of your friends coming! I'll make short work of them!"

Quick footsteps were heard outside. Someone was coming across the yard.

Cocking his revolver, Old King Brady took his place alongside the door, but in such a position that he could not be seen by anyone looking in at the window.

The footsteps came on and then halted.

Alice looked as though she was going to scream again, but she did not. Her face wore an air of eager expectancy.

Suddenly someone sprang up the steps and the door flew open.

"Halt! Throw up your hands!" cried Old King Brady.

The answer was a laugh.

"Why, Governor, would you shoot me?"

It was Young King Brady who had come bursting into the mill.

CHAPTER IX.

MARK BANNISTER CAPTURES A WIFE.

The light had been in Old King Brady's eyes and he had not recognized Harry at first sight.

Now he sprang forward and Alice's jaw dropped as she saw the two shaking hands.

"It would seem that you two are pretty well acquainted with each other," she exclaimed, sneeringly. "Never mind! You can never escape the boss, Jack Durand!"

"Jack nothing!" replied Harry. "That farce is over. I am this gentleman's friend. I'm all done with that other game."

"Anybody else likely to pounce on us, Harry?" demanded the old detective.

"Not for some time. We two are supposed to be on guard here. I've got a lot to tell you, and——"

"Wait! We will talk before a friend of mine who is waiting outside. I'll bring him right in."

Old King Brady hurried off to get Mark.

Then Alice burst out into a torrent of abuse.

"You have deceived me!" she cried. "You are a detective, too."

"That's what I am," said Harry, coolly, "but don't you worry. You meant to give the snap away to Mr. Blake."

"I meant to save Mr. Blake's life, but that was all. I have reasons for that, too."

"I daresay, you had better calm down and get on the band wagon while there is time."

"I don't know what you mean, and I don't care. A hundred detectives could not down Uncle Bill. He is sure to get you all in the end."

"And in the meantime we have got you."

"Never mind. My time will come. Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm not telling."

"Well, I can guess, I reckon. An old man and a young one working together. You are the Bradys, of course. I told Uncle Bill so the night I saw you together in No. 13, but he laughed at me. He said you wouldn't dare."

"It seems we did dare, then, but if you recognized me in the mill, how is it you didn't recognize me afterwards?"

"Oh, you know how to change your appearance. Never mind, my time will come."

"You said that before. Why were you so anxious to save Mr. Blake?"

"None of your business."

"You are polite. I——"

"Oh, oh!" screamed Alice all of a sudden.

Two figures had just passed the office window and the light was bright enough to allow their faces to be seen.

It was Old King Brady and Mark.

Alice buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Hello! There is going to be a scene here?" thought Harry. "What in thunder can it mean?"

"And this is the girl you have captured," said Mark, as he staggered into the room and dropped into a chair. "We must make her talk and expose this plot. Come, young woman, I am Marcus Bannister, vice president of this mine. I—Alice! For heaven sake!"

Alice had removed her hands now and she turned her tear-stained face toward the light.

Mark staggered to his feet.

"And so it's you!" he exclaimed. "The belle of Deadwood last winter! The girl to whom——"

"Stop, Mark!"

Alice drew herself up proudly.

"Why do you say it?" he demanded. "Have you——"

He paused.

Old King Brady had checked him with a sign.

"Mr. Bannister," said the old detective, "just step into the inside office here for a moment, I want to talk to you."

"Mark, don't listen to him!" cried the girl. "Hear my story first!"

"Your story will keep, I reckon," replied Mark, in a strained voice. "I want time to think until I know why you are here."

"But that man can't tell you. I can and will."

"I'll hear your side of the business later, Alice. Remember that this is business, and very serious, too. I saw the dynamite cartridges under this building with my own eyes. Joseph Blake happens to be my mother's brother, whatever else he may be."

"Yes, and it was for your sake I came here to save him, Mark! Believe me, that is so."

"She meant to save him," said Harry. "I will give her credit for that."

Alice glanced at him gratefully.

"You will hear me, Mark!" cried the girl. "You are in the greatest danger. You must not stop here."

"Mr. Brady, I must see this young woman alone for a few minutes," said Mark, decidedly.

"As you will," replied the old detective. "We will keep watch. You can take her into the other room."

"Make him take off these horrid handcuffs, Mark," pleaded Alice.

"Not yet," said Old King Brady. "I hold the key to those handcuffs, and I'll open them when I get ready, not before."

Young Bannister said nothing, but, assisting the girl to rise, led her into the other room and closed the door.

"Come," said Harry, "this is a great start. Lovers, of course!"

"It must be so. Probably that girl doesn't spend all her time here in this place; but now, Harry, tell me quick, what is the real danger of an attack here?"

"I can't tell you, Governor. My information all comes through Alice. The orders I got were to stay here until Mr. Blake came and then fire the train and blow up the mill while he was here in the office."

"Whose orders are these?"

"Bullion Bill's."

"Written?"

"No; the boys who placed the dynamite got written orders. Mine, as I told you, came through Alice."

"But the girl claims that she was here to save Blake."

"It is true. She stayed behind to give him warning. I had promised her not to fire the train until he was safely out of the place."

"I see. And her reason?"

"She told me that he was the uncle of the gentleman to whom she was engaged."

"Yes, yes. Then it is all plain. In some way Mark Bannister has been deceived about the girl. It will end up in our being obliged to let her go."

"Who is the man, anyhow? Is he actually vice president of the Golden Dream?"

"Certainly he is. I could get no word from you, so I chased down to Deadwood and got him to lend me a hand."

"How came he to be wounded?"

"Shot up in the woods by some prowlers. I got no sight of them. Bullion Bill's men, I suppose."

"Of course. Men guarding Mill 13. There is a big cave under that hill, Governor. The place is honeycombed with tunnels."

"I suppose so. How came they there?"

"According to Alice, they were made by old man Diller, who was supposed to be running a sheep ranch here in early days. Actually he was mining and his shepherds were really miners. He took out a fortune and he and his men returned to Switzerland with it, abandoning the ranch. That is Alice's story. Some of the tunnels have been lengthened by Bullion Bill's men and Mr. Blake."

"And the scheme on foot now is what?"

"I know nothing. I have seen very little of Bullion Bill. Of course, I have picked up a lot of general information, but it is hardly worth while to go into that now."

"Not at all. It will keep. Have they stolen much gold?"

"Lots of it. You would be surprised if you knew how much has been carried into the cave during the last week. But say, hadn't we better snake out that dynamite? I didn't dare touch it for fear I was being watched."

"It is unnecessary to say that you did not intend to blow up the mill."

"Certainly not!" laughed Harry. "Why not move the cartridges right now?"

"There is no need."

"What! You have had a hand in the game?"

"Hand enough to cut the fuse all along the train. Don't worry. Any old time will do to remove them. I think—but here they come!"

The unlocking of the door which Mark had fastened on the inside cut the conversation short.

The vice president of the Golden Dream came out with his hand resting upon Alice's shoulders.

It was very easy to see which way things had gone.

"Mr. Brady," he said, "will you oblige me with a minute's private talk?"

"Certainly," replied the old detective. "If there is any further time to waste."

"It will not be time wasted. It has to be."

"All right; then let us get right down to it. Shall we go into the other room?"

"If you please."

Old King Brady led the way in and Mark followed him, closing the door.

"It is not necessary for me to go into details, I suppose?" he said, as he sank down into Mr. Blake's revolving chair. "You see how the case stands between that girl and myself."

"It is plain enough for anyone to see."

"Then I need only tell you in a general way that we are engaged to be married. Alice figured in Deadwood society pretty prominently last season under the chaperonage of a rich aunt—her mother's sister. I supposed her to be in Europe, and naturally this discovery is a great surprise to me, but I love the girl and I mean to marry her, that is all."

"How comes she to be here?"

"It is on account of her mother, who is the sister of Bullion Bill, and is devoted to him."

"Has she told you all?"

"She has confessed everything, Mr. Brady, and has thrown herself on my mercy. I cannot and will not turn her down."

"What is the plan?"

"They move a large quantity of bullion in the morning. It goes by mule train over what is known as the back road. More is to follow at intervals during the week. It all goes to Deadwood."

"And your plan?"

"Is to go to No. 1 right now, taking Alice with me and leaving her in the care of the superintendent's wife who, as you know, lives there with her husband. I will then return with force enough to capture the gang."

"And Alice consents to all this?"

"More than that, she wishes it. She has given me every proof of her sincerity, Mr. Brady. You need not doubt."

There was nothing to be done but to yield, of course.

"How will you go?" asked the detective.

"There are several horses in the barn, Alice says."

"Still, you must not go off alone with that girl."

"Can't one of you go with us. Your partner——"

"He shall go. I will remain here."

"Thank you for yielding so gracefully, Mr. Brady, and now let me say that I want no mercy shown to Mr. Blake. If he comes here—and that is what is expected, it would seem—arrest him at once and hold him till we return."

"Very well, sir. I am entirely under your orders."

"We will make a start now," said Mark, wearily. "Of course, you will relieve Alice of her handcuffs?"

"Certainly, if you wish. It is up to you to see that the girl does not escape and give warning to Bullion Bill."

"She will not. You may rely upon it. She is devoted to me and I intend to marry her just as soon as we get back to Deadwood."

Old King Brady said no more.

They returned to the outer office and Old King Brady immediately removed the handcuffs.

Alice said not a word. She had not even spoken to Harry during their absence.

Old King Brady hurriedly explained the programme to his partner and Harry went for the horses.

There were four in the barn.

Harry saddled three and led them around to the front of the mill.

It was all Mark could do to mount, but Alice vaulted into the saddle like a man.

The last Harry saw of the old detective as they rode away he was standing on the steps of the mill with his arms folded and his big white hat tipped back on his head.

"The governor is upset," he said to himself. "He expects to see the whole case go by the board now."

This, however, was not so.

The old detective was merely thinking of Mark Bannister.

"That fellow is a fool," he was saying to himself. "What can he ever expect in the way of a good wife from that girl?"

CHAPTER X.

OLD KING BRADY GOES INTO PARTNERSHIP WITH BLAKE.

As soon as his companions had departed, Old King Brady put out the light and settled himself down in the inside office of Mill No. 14 to wait for Boss Blake.

"And, after all, I rather like the turn affairs have taken, if only the girl don't escape," he said to himself. "Mark Bannister couldn't go knocking about with that wound of his; Harry and a band of determined fellows will be just what we need to bring matters to a head. Only thing is, will they be able to hold the girl?"

This was a problem not to be answered.

Old King Brady had a problem of his own on hand before long.

It was to keep awake.

The old detective had lost much sleep of late and he soon discovered that he had all he could do to keep his eyes open.

And, after all, there had been no such haste.

Alice could not have been very well posted as to the intentions of the gang, it would seem, for two hours passed and still there was nothing doing.

Old King Brady allowed himself one nap as he sat there in the chair and he was just dropping off into a second when he heard a footstep outside.

"Coming!" thought the old detective.

He drew his revolver and sat ready.

It would have been an exciting moment for some, but Old King Brady was too old a hand at the business for that.

Mr. Blake was an elderly man, rough and uncouth.

He had been a miner all his life and had served two terms in congress as representative from the Deadwood district, having made a record for himself of never opening his mouth except to vote and seldom occupying his seat.

That he thoroughly understood his business was certain, hence with the backing of the late John Bannister, Mark's father and his own brother-in-law, he had been able to hold his own at the Golden Dream.

But Boss Blake was startled out of his habitual silence for once when, turning on the light, he saw Old King Brady standing just beyond the door of the inside office with a revolver leveled at his head.

"Who are you!" shouted Blake.

"Only Old King Brady, the detective, come to save you from your friends by making you my prisoner, Mr. Blake," the detective blandly replied.

Then came a surprise.

Boss Blake was an old man and had a weak heart.

It went back on him then.

He started to say something, what, Old King Brady could not make out, and then fell like a log to the floor.

"Thunder! This is another queer turn of affairs!" exclaimed the detective, springing forward to see what it was all about.

He soon discovered that it was nothing more than a fainting fit.

Snapping the handcuffs on the man's wrists, he dashed water in his face and waited for him to revive.

This Blake did in a minute.

Old King Brady was standing by calmly smoking.

Blake gave a deep sigh, and for a minute did not speak.

"Will you help me up?" he said at last. "I see you have handcuffed me, but I don't care to lie here."

The old detective lent the helping hand and led the man to his chair in the private office.

"By whose orders have you arrested me?" Blake asked, at last.

"Orders of Mark Bannister, vice president of the Golden Dream."

"My nephew! Impossible!"

"Not impossible at all, sir. All is known. It is well understood that you are the partner of Bullion Bill."

"Nonsense!"

"No nonsense about it. You have persistently robbed this mine. At the present moment the gold you have stolen is being turned into bullion at Mill 13. And that is not all. You are at the end of your rope. If I had not taken your case in hand you would now be dead."

"What do you mean?" demanded the superintendent, fiercely.

"As there is no possibility of your taking my word for anything until you know the truth, be good enough to follow me," said Old King Brady. "I propose to show you what ticklish ground you stand on, my friend."

Blake had relapsed into his usual silence now.

He arose and followed Old King Brady without a word.

The detective led him under the mill and showed him the dynamite cartridges and the fuse.

The old man was terribly disturbed.

"Whose work is this?" he demanded.

"It was done by order of Bullion Bill," Old King Brady replied.

"How do you know?"

"I saw the cartridges placed. Mark Bannister was with me at the time."

"Who did it?"

"Two men known as Tom Clegg and Bill Burke. A third, who remained behind with orders to fire the train as soon as you entered the office, I captured. He is now on his way with Mr. Bannister to Mill No. 1. Probably they have arrived there by this time."

"And you remained behind to capture me?"

"That's it."

"Remove those cartridges at once, Mr. Brady. This mill is too valuable a piece of property to be destroyed."

"There is no danger. I have cut the fuse."

"Then let us get back to the office and talk this over."

"We had best stay outside. Bullion Bill or his representatives are now waiting to hear the explosion. When they don't hear it some of them will surely come here to see why it has not occurred."

"That is so. Let us get over by the barn, where we can watch without being seen. We will talk there."

"As you will; I don't know, however, that I have anything particular to say."

"I have, then."

"Very good."

They walked to the barn and took their places behind it.

"Now, then, what do you intend to do with me?" Blake asked.

"To hold you until Mark Bannister's return."

"Don't do it."

"Why?"

"It won't pay you."

"I doubt that."

"I tell you it won't. Your best hold, Mr. Brady, is to stand in with me."

"I am open to an offer."

"Of course you are. Every man has his price. I realize that yours is high, and I am prepared to make the offer in proportion."

"Well."

"Let me tell you something. I am a man who never goes back on a friend nor lets up on an enemy. Here, where there can be no witnesses to our conversation, I admit to you that the charge you make against me is quite true. I have been the partner of Bullion Bill in this business. We are to-night working on our final run of the richest ore the Golden Dream can yield. It was by Bill's suggestion that the mill was to be blown up. It was intended that people should think that I was blown to pieces with it, but it seems that Bill intended to make this an actual fact. You see, I acknowledge all."

"There is not the least doubt of it, as Mark Bannister will bear witness."

"I shall not ask him. I hope never to see him again. Now listen, Mr. Brady. Bill is not on hand to-night. He is expected early in the morning with two wagons for the purpose of hauling bullion to Deadwood. We have accumulated a large quantity. One wagon will leave at daylight starting from Mill No. 13. The other goes to-morrow. On the first wagon there will be upwards of three hundred thousand dollars' worth of bullion. I know the road they go by; there will be but two men in charge. Take me to a place which I will show you and we will wreck this wagon and hide the bullion in the woods. It is yours. All I ask is that you then set me free and allow me the privilege of disappearing forever. Come, what do you say?"

Old King Brady had made up his mind while Boss Blake was still speaking.

"I agree to your proposition," he said, "but how is the thing to be done?"

"It is very simple. We have only to weaken the supports of a bridge over which the wagon will have to cross and allow it to tumble in."

"Is the place far from here?"

"Between three and four miles."

"You are good for the walk?"

"Yes, and for twenty miles more to get revenge upon Bullion Bill."

"There is a horse in the barn here. We might take that."

"No. To go by the road would be only to lead to discovery. I propose to go over the hills."

"Very well. So let it be, and the sooner we start the better."

"You will handcuff me?"

"Yes, with the understanding that I shoot you on the spot if you make an effort to escape."

"I shan't do that. You have my full permission to shoot me if I do."

Old King Brady then proceeded to search his man.

Mr. Blake offered no objection.

He even told the detective in which pocket he would find his revolver.

The detective then took off the handcuffs.

Mr. Blake did but little talking after that.

They ascended the hill to the tunnel and were pushing on when Old King Brady paused.

"There is someone moving about down there!" he exclaimed, in a low voice.

They stood motionless behind a large tree listening.

"As sure as you live," said Blake.

Suddenly a light flashed and they caught sight of two men crawling under the mill.

They were examining the train.

"You are satisfied now that I have told the truth?" inquired the old detective.

"Yes; I was satisfied before," was the reply.

"Can you make out those men?"

"I caught sight of Tom Clegg's face when he flashed the light. I would not undertake to say who the other is."

"Ha! They are going into the office now. In a moment your escape will be discovered."

"Let us go. We have no time to lose. You have disarmed me, Mr. Brady. If we should happen to run into Bullion Bill's guard which he always keeps on this hill when No. 13 is running you will have to do the shooting, and I hope you will make short work of it."

"I'll attend to that," replied the old detective, and they hurried on over the hill.

There was no trouble in finding the way now, for Mr. Blake knew every foot of it, so it would seem.

In a short time they were down on the Black Creek road not far from the Diller ranch.

Without breaking the silence which he had maintained since they left the mill, Mr. Blake turned in the opposite direction from the creek and hurried on. Soon they descended into a deep valley where a shallow creek ran.

Here the road crossed a rude bridge.

It was an ideal spot for a holdup.

Hills rose on each side to a height of several hundred feet, and there was no chance to cross the creek except by the bridge.

Mr. Blake now looked at his watch.

The night was advancing. It was now half-past three o'clock.

"Here we are, Mr. Brady," he said. "In an hour's time the wagon will cross this bridge. It is up to you to do the rest."

Old King Brady went down under the bridge and examined its supports, ordering Mr. Blake to accompany him.

Four timbers held up the bridge; they were not fastened

to it; they had been driven into the sandy bed of the creek and were held in place by stones piled around them."

"Does the bridge rest on the ground at all?" questioned the detective.

"I can go up and see."

"We will both go."

"You do not trust me yet, Mr. Brady, although you must see that I have told you the truth."

"I know of no reason whatever why I should trust you. We will keep together, that's all."

"As you will," said Blake, briefly, and they ascended the bank again.

The planks have but a slight hold on the bank," said the detective. "If the supports are removed a heavy loaded wagon is certain to bring the bridge down."

"It is. Do you propose to go in for it?"

"Yes."

"Then let us get to work. All we have to do is to remove the stones and pull the timbers out. It can easily be done."

They went right at it then.

Difficulty there was none, but it took time.

In half an hour, however, the bridge was in the condition they wanted it.

"We will take our place on the side of the hill among those bushes," said Old King Brady. "If for any reason the bridge don't fall, I shall attack the driver."

"I will help if you will give me back my revolver. We ought to be good for them. I am sure there will be only two men with the team."

"No; I will keep both revolvers, my friend, and now while we are waiting, tell me how a man in your position ever came to get mixed up in such business as this."

"I shall tell you nothing," growled Blake. "I look to you to fulfill your end of the contract, that's all."

"Then you will be disappointed with the ending, my friend, and that's all," thought Old King Brady, "for the instant I am through with this business, on go the bracelets again."

They sat down on the hillside and waited.

Three-quarters of an hour passed, and slowly enough, before the attention of both was suddenly attracted by the rumbling of a heavy wagon along the road.

"It's coming," breathed Blake.

"That's what," replied Old King Brady, "and now to see whether our scheme will succeed or fail."

CHAPTER XI.

HARRY GIVES BULLION BILL THE SLIP.

With Young King Brady and his companions things might have gone well enough if Mark Bannister had not given out on the road.

They had gone but a comparatively short distance from

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 26.)

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Mill No. 14 when Mark's strength suddenly began to fail him and he pulled in his horse with a gasping cry.

"Oh, Alice! Help, Brady! I'm dying, I think!" he called out.

He was swaying in the saddle.

Harry had just time to spring to the ground and catch him as he fell.

Fortunately the horse stood and he was able to lift him down.

Whether Mark was conscious when his feet struck the ground or not is an open question, but at all events he immediately sank, and when Harry laid him out upon the grass Young King Brady honestly believed him to be dead.

"He's a goner, Alice!" he exclaimed. "Quick! See what you can do, and for heaven sake stop that noise."

It was strange! Alice, cool and collected always, was acting like a lunatic now.

Screaming and wringing her hands, she kept calling on Harry to do something.

Now she threw herself down beside her lover, kissed and caressed him, calling him pet names.

Harry had no whisky, and he ran ahead to look for water, thinking to find it at no great distance, for they were still among the hills.

But he had no such good luck.

Before he had gone a hundred yards he heard mounted men rapidly approaching.

There was the chance that it might be some of the enemy, of course, but there was an equal chance of its being only miners on their way to Black Creek, and Young King Brady halted in the hope that this was true, and that one of them might have a whisky flask.

In an instant he knew his mistake, for who should come dashing around the bend of the trail but Bullion Bill himself, accompanied by two men!

It was one of those occasions when the end of everything seems to have come.

"What bluff can I ever give him?" thought Young King Brady. "Something must be done, and that mighty quick, too, if I want to live."

"Hello!" he shouted, throwing up his hands. "Cap, it's me!"

"Jack Durand! By thunder, what brings you here!" cried the gold crook, reining in.

He made a motion to draw his revolver and then seemed to think better of it.

"You had your orders! Why didn't you stay at No. 14?" he demanded. "Talk quick, young feller, if you want to live!"

"Give me a show, will you," said Harry. "It's no doings of mine. I got my orders from Alice, and I am following her orders now."

"What do you mean?"

"I am trying to tell you. Everything was done as you ordered, and I was waiting at No. 14, when Alice came back with a gentleman she called Mr. Bannister."

"Bannister! Flames and furies! That man here? Alice with him against my orders! I'll fix her!"

The bluff had not worked.

Harry saw no way but to bring the girl into the business, since Bullion Bill was bound to know that she was in it in a very few moments.

He trusted to Alice's natural shrewdness to help him out in this, but the rage of the gold crook showed how vain this hope had been.

"Where are they? Tell me all about it or I'll blow you galley-west!" roared Bill, pulling out his revolver now.

"Say, come, boss, you won't give me half a show to speak," said Harry, assuming a coolness which he was far from feeling, "the gent had been shot in the shoulder. Alice seemed to know him. She said the only thing to do was to get him to No. 1, so we started and he's just collapsed on the road. It's my opinion he is dead."

"And a blamed good job, then, if he is," snarled Bill. "But what were you doing here?"

"I came ahead to look for water to see if I couldn't bring him to."

"Back with you then!" cried Bill. "Get up here in front of me. Quick, now!"

"Why, it's only a step, Cap."

"Run, then, and if you are not mighty lively about it you'll get a bullet in your back."

Young King Brady started back on the run.

In a moment Bullion Bill and his men were up with Alice, who sat at the side of the road supporting Mark's head in her lap.

It had been only a fainting fit after all, and Mark was now quite himself again.

"Captain Bill Lemons, how are you?" he called out. "I'm right glad you have come, for I'm in a bad way and need help."

"He'll take care of himself and Alice will manage her end," thought Young King Brady. "There is no need of me butting in on this."

He stood aside and said nothing.

"Howdy, Mr. Bannister," said Bill, walking up and extending his hand. "What in thunder has struck you?"

Mark Bannister could romance pretty well, it seemed, and he evidently appreciated the necessity of doing it now.

"Why, I have been shot," he said. "I came down here last night to see if I couldn't find you. I managed to lose my horse first and then I lost my way and found myself up by the old Diller ranch. I started then to cross over the hill to No. 14. Thought I would tie up for the night with Uncle Joe Blake and go on to Black Creek in the morning. First thing I knew some fellows came upon me in the woods and shot me in the shoulder. The wound has made me as weak as a cat."

"Is that so?" said Bullion Bill. "That's bad, Mark. Well, what did you do then?"

"Why, the fellows skinned out, and after a long while I got up strength enough to go on to No. 14, where I fell in with Alice and this young fellow. Alice got lost in the

woods, too, it seemed. I never was so surprised in my life as I was when I found that she was your niece, Bill. I thought she was in Europe all this time. You know that we met in Deadwood last winter, and——"

"Yes, I know all about it," broke in Bill. "Yes, Alice is my niece. For the present she is stopping with me. Sorry to see you in this fix, Mark. Your father and me were always good friends. You can trust yourself in my hands. Come right along with us and I'll make you comfortable in a ranch I have fixed up lately. I suppose Alice told you all about it. That's the place for you."

Bullion Bill spoke quietly enough, but there was a touch of sarcasm in his tone which showed Harry that he undoubtedly meant mischief.

"He don't believe a word of that yarn," he thought. "What is to be done? Nothing, as matters stand, I suppose."

"I was heading for No. 1," said Mark. "I think I had better go on there."

"Alice, what do you think?" demanded Bill, turning suddenly on the girl.

"I think what you think, Uncle Bill," was the reply. "I want to do the best for Mark I can."

"Oh, come, we are pretty intimate it seems," sneered Bill.

"You know?"

"Yes, I know."

"And I hope you don't object, Bill," said Bannister. "Alice might do worse than to marry me."

"We'll talk that over later," was the reply. "The first thing to do is to get you to my ranch, where we can put you to bed and look after you. Here, boys, help me get Mr. Bannister on his horse, or rather you do it. I want to speak to Alice a minute. It's all right, Mark. You needn't be afraid of me."

"And why should I be?" demanded Bannister. "If there is a straight man in South Dakota it is Bullion Bill."

The gold crook laughed.

"Come, Alice," he said, and the girl followed him a little way down the road.

Here they stood talking for as much as ten minutes.

If the interview was anything but a pleasant one, neither of them showed it by raising their voices in the least.

Young King Brady was on pins and needles, so to speak.

He saw no way out of it, nor could he doubt for an instant that Mark Bannister was being taken a prisoner to Bullion Bill's secret den.

"And I must go with him," he thought. "It is the only way. If I was to make a break for the woods it would amount to nothing. I should surely be run down and killed."

The interview was over at last and Bullion Bill mounted, ordering all hands to do the same.

The two men now rode ahead, Alice and Mark Bannister coming next.

Bullion Bill drew up close to Harry's horse and said in a low tone:

"Was anything done about No. 14?"

"Everything was done just as you ordered," replied Harry, quietly.

"The train was laid?"

"Yes."

"And you were waiting to fire it?"

"Yes."

"What brought Alice there?"

"I'm sure I can't say. She told me that she lost her way trying to get over the hill through the woods in the dark."

"What did she do that for? Nobody knows the underground way any better than she does."

"I couldn't tell you, for I don't know."

"Which came to No. 14 first, Alice or this man?"

"He came first."

"Did they meet as friends?"

"Why, certainly. Alice told me that she was engaged to him."

"She thinks she is, but she will never marry him."

"That's none of my business."

"No it isn't—you are right."

"That's why I didn't care to butt in. I have received my orders from you through Alice right along, and I had nothing to do but what she told me."

"That's right. All the same my plans are spoiled."

"Why? The night is not over yet. What's the matter with me going up to No. 14 now?"

"Could you find your way?"

"Sure I could. I'm not so dumb but what I noticed the way we came."

"I'll think of it."

"All right. Anything you say goes."

They rode on in silence.

Bullion Bill was evidently deep in thought.

At last they came to the place where it was necessary to turn off in order to reach No. 14.

"You can go back to the mill, Jack," said the gold crook, suddenly. "Don't go in—don't do anything. Just wait till I come. Better leave your horse in the woods a little this side; you can sneak up and see if all is quiet."

"All right, Cap," replied Harry, and he was just starting when the gold crook called to him:

"By the way, Jack."

"Aye, aye, Cap!"

"You know Boss Blake?"

"Why, certainly I know Boss Blake."

"If he happens to come out—you needn't go in, mind you—but if he should happen out, would you mind plugging him?"

"Not a bit. I have no revolver, though."

"I'll lend you one. Come here and get it."

Harry turned his horse and rode back.

Bullion Bill handed him a good revolver.

"Now be off," he said. "I'll join you at No. 14 in a little while."

"He don't suspect me," thought Young King Brady, jubilantly. "Now is my time."

He rode on until he came in sight of No. 14.

The mill was dark, but it still stood.

Young King Brady could distinctly see its outlines against the hill.

"It's now or never!" he muttered. "I may as well make the break."

He turned his horse and rode back to the crossroad, turning into the other trail like a whirlwind.

He fully expected a shot, but none came.

"My chance!" thought Young King Brady.

Clapping his heels to his horse's flanks, he went dashing off toward Mill No. 1.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

"That's the gold wagon," said Mr. Blake. "We shall know in a minute now whether or not we have done our work well, but this is only half the job, Mr. Brady."

"I agree with you," replied the old detective, "catching on" in an instant. "We want Bullion Bill himself."

"That's what we do. Suppose I help you to get him, what then?"

"How do you mean? We have already struck our bargain."

"I mean what will you do with him? If I was sure you had evidence to convict the man without involving me I'd show you how to get him. He is expected at Mill No. 13 early this morning. More than likely he is there now."

"I have evidence enough to convict him a dozen times over, but how can I avoid involving you?"

"I suppose that is impossible. All the same I'd give all I expected to make out of this deal to see him go to the penitentiary. I don't want him shot. He wouldn't suffer but a minute. I want to see him suffer for twenty years."

Old King Brady thought fast.

"There is a whole lot in this," he said to himself. "If I arrest this man and hold him Mark Bannister won't thank me in spite of what he said. I've a great mind to swap him off for Bullion Bill—to use him and let him go."

And on the spur of the moment he determined to do this.

"After all, it is Bullion Bill I'm gunning for, and not Joe Blake," he thought.

But it was now time to think of other things, for the wagon was close at hand.

In a moment it came in sight around the bend of the road.

Old King Brady waited breathlessly.

"It's a shame to have to lose all this stuff after the trouble I've been at," he heard Blake mutter.

The words were scarcely spoken when the mules were on the bridge.

They crossed in safety.

For the moment the detective thought that the bridge was going to hold.

But once the heavy wagon brought its weight to bear upon the planks they went in.

A loud exclamation broke from the two men as the wagon went crashing down into the creek.

The pole-straps broke with the fall and the mules went dashing off down the road.

"Landed!" cried Blake, and they both rushed down the hill.

"Hold on, there! You'll surrender or pick up a bullet!" shouted the detective.

He thought he had two men to deal with, but it proved to be only one.

The other was pinned down by the heavy boxes, which had slid forward and had him fast.

"What in thunder is all this?" demanded the driver, as he came crawling up the bank. "That you, Boss Blake? You don't mean to say that you have gone back on the gang?"

"Stop your talk and throw up your hands, or I'll put a ball into you!" cried Old King Brady.

The man sullenly obeyed in part.

"This is a put-up job, hey?" he growled. "Well, it won't work. Bullion Bill will square this thing."

Bang!

Old King Brady sent a bullet whizzing past his ear.

"Stand still!" he shouted, as the man jumped to one side. "Next time I shoot to kill. Mr. Blake, now is your time. Do as I said. Put your hands behind you, man! Quick, now, or you die!"

It had been previously arranged with Blake and Old King Brady had given him the stout cord to do the trick with.

And the superintendent appeared to know his business, too, for in a minute he had the fellow securely tied.

Meanwhile the other man had been calling out for help and to know what the matter was.

The detective soon released him and he was dragged out of the creek and tied up like his companion.

The plan had worked like a charm.

"And now what?" demanded Blake. "Will you go me on my last proposition, Mr. Brady? Shall we make a strike for Bullion Bill?"

"Yes; I'll go you."

"Good enough; and these men?"

"We will leave them here. They can do nothing. If they make their escape it won't matter so much."

"That's right. They are only a couple of tramps Bullion Bill picked up. He has a beautiful way of promising every man he takes on five thousand dollars within a couple of weeks. They never get it. They are lucky if they don't get a bullet in the back, that's been the pay of more than one."

They hurried off then, leaving the men by the roadside bound hand and foot.

"What is your plan?" demanded Old King Brady.

"To take you to Mill No. 13 by way of the old Diller

tunnels. If you can only catch him foul I shall be satisfied, and I think you can."

"And you?"

"I'm not in it. All I'm figuring on now is a chance to escape."

"You'll get it."

"And the gold? What do you propose to do about that?"

"I'll take care of the gold."

"Nobody ever passes this way. I could help you. We might easily get away with it together."

"And Bill?"

"I can show you a place where you could hold him a prisoner safe enough. After we have secured the gold you could come back and get him."

"We'll see about that. We have to capture him first. I suppose there are others at the mill?"

"Yes, but we can give them the slip if we are shrewd. Wait and see."

Full of the thought of his revenge, Boss Blake was doing more than his usual share of talking now.

They pushed on to the Diller ranch, where Blake showed Old King Brady the secret door.

It was just as Harry had supposed.

On the night of his initiation he had been led back and forth blindfolded simply to deceive him.

The door through which he had passed was in the back of the ranch, which was built against the hill.

"Off to give me that lantern of yours and I will lead the way," said Blake, as they passed in. "In a very short time we will be at Mill 13."

On a moment King Brady reached Mill No. 1 without meeting anyone on the road.

At Falas challenged by the watchman, who at first refused to call Superintendent Alexander, but when Harry told the man that Mark Bannister had sent him he yielded, and after awhile Mr. Alexander put in an appearance.

Mr. Alexander was not a bright proposition, and Harry had to explain the situation several times before he could be made to comprehend the necessity of prompt action.

"I can't believe that Captain Lemons would do any harm to Mr. Bannister," he kept saying. "I always found him a decent fellow. I have never believed the stories which are out against him, and I don't believe them now."

"But I tell you he is working up gold ore in Mill 13," said Harry. "He tried to blow up 14 to-night and Mr. Blake in it."

"I don't believe that, either," was the reply. "I know you. The mere fact of your coming here with this story isn't enough."

Young King Brady was in despair.

He had already shown Mr. Alexander his detective's shield, and he did not see what more he could do to convince the man.

"Very well. I can't drag you down to 13," he said. "If you won't help me I must go back and see what I can do for myself."

"I'll go down at daylight with some of my men. I don't see any use in starting out in the dark," was the reply.

Harry did not even answer him.

"I was a fool that I didn't put it through to No. 14 and report to the Governor," he said to himself, as he leaped into the saddle. "To think that I wouldn't even take the time to do that in my haste to get to this stupid fool."

He clapped his heels to his horses' flanks and rode off without another word.

But he had misjudged his man after all.

Mr. Alexander was just one of those vacillating characters who is never of the same mind two minutes.

Harry had not covered half the distance between the two mills when he heard a great clatter of hoofs behind him.

Divining what it meant he halted, and in a minute the superintendent came dashing up, followed by a band of fifteen men.

"Here I am, young fellow!" he cried. "We'll soon see how much truth there is in your story. If you have been lying to me I'll hang you to the nearest tree."

"I'll take chances on the hanging," replied Harry. "All I ask you is to come with me to Mill 13."

"That's what we are here for," growled Alexander, and in a minute they were on the go again.

* * * * *

"Here we are, Brady. Now you can see what is going on in Mill 13."

It was Mr. Blake who had spoken.

The rascally superintendent had led Old King Brady through the old Diller tunnel directly to the mill, avoiding a cross-tunnel which led into the lower cave.

They now found themselves in the upper cave where the great pile of gold ore lay.

Mr. Blake had been cautious, and they halted some time at the end of the tunnel to make sure that the gold was not under guard.

Nobody could be seen, however, and now they could hear the clank of the great ore crushers distinctly; the ground beneath them trembled. The haunted mill was being worked for all it was worth.

"How many men are at work in there?" asked Old King Brady.

"Ten, without counting Bullion Bill himself," was the reply. "Step this way, Mr. Brady, you shall look into the place and see for yourself."

Advancing close to the wall, Blake pressed a spring and a tiny panel opened.

Old King Brady had already shut off his light and they stood in perfect silence.

The detective found himself looking into the laboratory now.

There sat Alice tied to a chair, while opposite was Mark Bannister tied to another.

Old King Brady heard Blake give a muttered exclamation. Just then his attention was attracted by the opening of the laboratory door and in walked Bullion Bill with a cocked revolver in his hand.

"Now, then, Mark Bannister, I have come to settle accounts with you!" the gold crook called out. "I tell you I'd rather see Alice dead than married to you. I hated your father as I never hated any man on earth, and my niece shall never marry his son."

"What right have you to dictate to me?" screamed Alice. "I'm not your daughter. Isn't it enough that I have had to live this wild life with you when I was brought up to better things. It's an outrage the way you have treated Mark and me to-night, Uncle Bill. You knew I got engaged to him last winter in Deadwood. You thought you had talked me out of it, and I thought so, too, till I saw Mark to-night, but I won't be dictated to by you or anyone else. If you kill Mark I'll have you imprisoned, Uncle Bill."

"Shut up, you idiot!" cried Bill, locking the laboratory door.

"Now, Mark," he added, "you will come with me and we'll soon settle this thing."

He drew out a knife and cut the cords which held Mark to the chair.

"I've pressed the secret spring. The door is unfastened, Brady. All you have to do is to put your hand on the peephole and pull!" whispered Blake in Old King Brady's ear.

"Bill, you'll regret this," said Mark, with a calmness which was really remarkable. "Listen to reason. I——"

He was interrupted by the loud clatter of hoofs outside.

There were shouts and a shot was fired. Then came a furious knocking on the door.

"Cap! Cap!" Tom Clegg's voice sang out, "there's a big gang down upon us! Open the door—quick!"

It was not that door which opened, but another, and the detective, revolver in hand, sprang into the room.

"Up hands, Bullion Bill!" Old King Brady shouted. "Back against the wall and drop that revolver or you're a dead man!"

It is strange how the biggest bullies are ever the biggest cowards.

One would not have supposed that Bullion Bill would have been awed by one man.

But so it was, and so they found him backed against the wall and held at bay by Old King Brady's revolver when, a moment later, Harry, followed by Mr. Alexander and his men, broke through the door and burst into the room.

"And now who is right?" cried Young King Brady.

"Cover him, Harry!" cried the old detective, and he jumped in and put the bracelets on Bullion Bill.

The case of Bullion Bill ended right there in the laboratory of Mill 13.

Once he got down to business, Mr. Alexander was active enough.

Taken unawares, the mill men were quickly put at bay, and Old King Brady had already done the same for Bullion Bill.

And so all hands were taken into custody but Mr. Blake. When they came to look for the superintendent he was gone.

He had flown through the Diller tunnel and he was never heard of again.

Mark Bannister soon recovered from his wound, and within a week married Alice De Lisle.

Mrs. De Lisle, who was half a fool, was found asleep in the cave. She did not seem to care what happened to her and readily accompanied her daughter to Deadwood.

The gold at the bridge was all recovered and the two men arrested.

Bullion Bill got twenty years and his men were all sentenced to the penitentiary on shorter terms.

And so the case ended.

Mill No. 13 runs right along now, and the Golden Dream is paying better than ever. The detectives were well paid for their services, too.

How Mark Bannister got along with his wife we cannot say, for we have now told all that we know concerning the case of The Bradys and Bullion Bill.

THE END.

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